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# BROAD CHURCH THEOLOGY

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

### SOME OPINIONS OF BROAD CHURCHMEN

FEW subjects deserve more serious attention than the theology of the Broad Church School. It penetrates far deeper than our ordinary controversies on ceremonial, or on certain modern forms of devotional expression. It is concerned with the very foundations of the Faith. To ignore it therefore and to confine our interest to other matters would be to lack a sense of proportion. It is supported by able minds. Its literature is steadily increasing.

And yet when we come to face it the peculiarity of this School consists in a decided element of uncertainty. It is easy to say what the Evangelical School represents. The Evangelical School stands for personal religion, personal devotion to Christ, and belief in the Atonement through Christ's Death. It is also easy to say what the Catholic School represents. It adheres to the corporate traditional faith of all the Christian centuries. It is Institutional and Sacramental. There is no difficulty in predicting what a member either of the Evangelical or of the Catholic School will believe. But when we come to the Broad Church

School this is not the case. It is not easy to determine with precision what its doctrines are.

This peculiarity is caused by the fact that the Broad Church School is based on the principle of individual independence. Doubtless all religious assent is ultimately an act of private judgment. For it is impossible to escape our individual responsibility. But the religious assent of the Broad Church School is distinguished by its rejection of authority. As a writer on the Broad Church School describes it: the Catholic begins by inquiring what is the teaching of the Church; the Broad Churchman asks himself first of all what his own Reason and Conscience can teach him.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Broad Church School is founded on the principle of the independence of the individual reason as against corporate authority. They agree in the general idea of individual independence. Accordingly freedom and liberty are their constant watchwords. Their bugbear is authority. The titles of their books are suggestive. One is *Freedom in the Church*, another is the *Gospel of Freedom*; another is *Anglican Liberalism*. Freedom appears to represent emancipation from the Corporate Traditions: the right of the individual to hold his judgment in suspense, or if need be so to contradict, in spite of affirmations either of the Creed or of the Scriptures or of the Universal Church.

This principle in the hands of logically minded and thoroughgoing persons is capable of reaching advanced extremes. Thus Reville, Protestant professor of theology in the University of Paris, says

<sup>1</sup> Symes, *Broad Church*, p. vii,

that Liberal Protestantism is distinguished by its opposition to authority. It is "opposed to all intellectual servitude and to all obligatory creed."<sup>1</sup> It resents the practice of imposing dogmas like that of the Trinity on the human mind. The liberal Protestant is independent of the authority of the tradition in the Church to which he may happen to belong.<sup>2</sup> He considers that the Reformers were extreme conservatives in dogma.<sup>3</sup> He deprecates anything like a metaphysical doctrine concerning the Person of Christ.<sup>4</sup> He would separate religion from dogma and from Sacraments.<sup>5</sup> Thus when the principle of liberal Protestantism is logically carried out to its conclusions it will "include among its adherents men who profess entirely different philosophical opinions on theological beliefs, extending from those who retain various traditional dogmas to those who maintain a spiritualistic Pantheism."<sup>6</sup> Indeed these comprehensive tendencies are rather in the direction of the unorthodox. For it is distinctly stated and restated that liberal Protestantism rejects the orthodox doctrines, whether Catholic or Protestant, concerning Redemption by the sacrifice of Christ, or the Trinity, or the metaphysical divinity of Christ.<sup>7</sup> All these are simply philosophical hypotheses, and liable to revision.

It is well to realize the conclusions to which the logical Frenchman pushes the principle of individual independence.

<sup>1</sup> J. Reville, *Le Protestantisme Libéral*, 1903, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> P. 6.

<sup>3</sup> P. 15.

<sup>4</sup> P. 47.

<sup>5</sup> P. 61.

<sup>6</sup> P. 65.

<sup>7</sup> P. 72.

Obviously whether in logical France or in practical England, the principle must naturally lead to great variety of opinions, and indeed to serious contradiction on matters of profound importance.

But the diversity of the conclusions which this principle naturally creates makes it quite unfair to ascribe to the Broad Church School what an individual member may maintain. It will be found as a fact that certain individual Broad Churchmen reject the doctrine of the Trinity while others affirm it, and deny the divine Personality of our Lord while others maintain it. And with regard to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth there will be found within the School all conceivable variations of caution and reserve, of boldness and decision, of suspense and indecision, natural to the varieties of individual temperament.

Hence the only fair course to take in discussing them is to regard their statements simply as *the opinions of individuals*: to take them separately; ascribing the responsibility to the author alone, each individual being held responsible for his own essay and his own opinions, while we carefully refrain from assuming that the Corporate approval of any Broad Church Council rests upon any assertion in particular.

We take then a few specific instances.

I. Concerning the Virgin Birth.—The Broad Churchman will sometimes refrain from denying, but he will refuse to affirm. He will possibly say, "there is no denial in this treatise of the Virgin Birth,"<sup>1</sup> but he will go on to say all that can be

<sup>1</sup> Allen, p. vii.

said against the reasonableness of the belief. Either he will affirm that the clause was not originally inserted in the Church with intention of declaring the Virgin Birth, but only the reality of the human nature; or he will say that the doctrine has no practical value; or that it is not essential to belief in the Incarnation; or he will declare that it is a theory which we moderns should not expect, thereby criticizing S. Luke. Or he will accumulate pagan parallels, or cite objections and difficulties. Or he will say that what the Church believes is not necessarily true. But as a rule he will not balance these negatives with the positive reasons which might be presented. He will end by holding his judgment in suspense, and will assert that this attitude can be justified.

2. Concerning the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity.—According to a writer of the Broad Church School there are three ways in which God can be represented. First, as apart from the world; secondly, in nature; thirdly, in the human heart. Under the first aspect He is the Father; under the second the Word, or voice as spoken; under the third He is the Spirit. These aspects are not peculiar to Christianity. They answer to common human needs and experiences. Each element of the doctrine satisfies a craving of the human spirit.

In Christianity God reveals Himself to us in these three ways: He is Father, He is the Word, He is Spirit. And so we say one God in Trinity. We say three *persons* in one God.

But as to this word *Personality* we ought to have misgivings. Is it appropriate applied to Deity? For what does Personality represent? When

applied to ourselves it represents limitation. It is that which sets us apart and isolates.

“Personality is a precious word to us. It sums up all the elements by which we know ourselves. In all our thoughts of the life to come, the preservation of our personality seems the one thing essential. It is natural, therefore, that we should offer this word, enshrining our more precious possession, as a tribute to God. Yet we may doubt whether such tribute is acceptable. For in what does it consist? If we try to define our own personality, we shall soon see that it is made up largely of limitations. We know ourselves by the differences which distinguish us from others, enclosing us, like so many walls, and shutting us off from the rest of creation. Now in so far as personality means something which is negative, limited by conditions of place and time and power and even memory, it is singularly inappropriate as a description of the Infinite and the Eternal, of Him Who is above all and through all and in all. The word ‘person’ comes to us from the Latin. It was most unwillingly that theologians used it to translate a Greek word which had no such limiting sense, because the Latin language, so poor in philosophical terms, had nothing better to offer. And if Latin writers, beginning with S. Augustine, deplored the use of so misleading a word, English writers have no less cause to regret it. For whereas the Greek Fathers, with their exquisite language, were able to express the conception of a Triune Infinity without implying limitations, the poverty of our language and the force of habit oblige us, when we translate their writings, to introduce the word ‘person.’ Only by an effort can we free our thoughts of God from the trammels of our familiar spirit, implying a world where all beings are finite. In so far as we are able to do so we shall deliver our souls from a



burden which is most offensive to those who are more reflective.

"Yet we would not altogether divorce our conception of God from personality. For Jesus, in Whom the immortal Godhead was manifested on earth, was in this respect, as in others, perfect man: and we are unable to conceive the exalted Christ as being other than personal. That is a mystery too. But it is one to which we cling; for in the parables of His divine personality we dimly see the reconciliation of the finite with the infinite, of the temporal with the eternal." <sup>1</sup>

3. Concerning Christ, a Broad Church writer maintains that He is a human person "in Whom the immortal Godhead was manifested," that is to say, He is a reflection of Deity. He has for us the value of God, but as a fact He differs from us in degree and not in kind. He has the moral attributes of Deity, but He is not essentially identical with Deity. His personality is human. Liberal writers who hesitate to ascribe personality to God must refuse to teach the divine personality of Jesus Christ. Thus Incarnation is no part of this liberal theory, and Jesus Christ, if we desire to speak with strictness and exact accuracy, cannot in the traditional sense be called God's Son.

4. Concerning Dogmas in general, a Broad Church writer maintains that they can be classified in the following divisions, tentatively perhaps but usefully.<sup>2</sup> First, spiritual Dogmas, such as that God is our Father and Jesus Christ the Divine Logos. These are incapable of demonstration. Secondly,

<sup>1</sup> Glazebrook, *The Faith of a Modern Churchman*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Major, *The Gospel of Freedom*, p. 63.

historical Dogmas, such as the Virgin Birth, which depend for proof upon historical evidence. Thirdly, scholastic Dogmas, or philosophical decisions, as the dogma of the Trinity. Of this third class it is said : " it is those particular dogmas which often produce most difficulty and rouse most opposition on the part of educated laymen." <sup>1</sup>

On the third class the author asks, Are we to treat them as absolutely authoritative or not? His answer is :

" Personally I feel quite unable to regard them as absolutely authoritative. To regard them as absolutely authoritative seems to me to involve as a logical necessity a belief in the infallibility of the Church. Now I cannot bring myself to believe in the infallibility of the Church. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

It is acknowledged that these Dogmas have a good deal of authority attaching to them, so long as that authority is admitted to be of a fallible order.

" We shall therefore give them our respectful attention, our prayerful consideration, before we reject or refute them. But we cannot undertake to regard them as absolutely and eternally true, simply because they have the support of this authority. But though we may not regard them as absolutely and eternally true, it does not follow of necessity that we must regard them as untrue, and teach others so. There is a middle course, and for those whom we have to teach, who are troubled in conscience, it may be well to put it forward." <sup>3</sup>

5. Concerning the formulas of the Nicene Creed.—Thus a Broad Churchman may adopt a middle course between acceptance and rejection.

<sup>1</sup> Major, *The Gospel of Freedom*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> P. 82.

<sup>3</sup> P. 85.

"For example, take the Nicene interpretation of the mystery of the Trinity, or the Chalcedonian decision as to the relation of the manhood to the godhead in Christ. Now I may, I think, both honestly and reasonably adopt this attitude towards these dogmas and others of a like kind. I do not think that human beings in their present state have any faculties for making absolute decisions of this kind. Insufficient data, mental and moral imperfections, all prevent it being done with certainty. I do not feel at all assured that infinite mystery is a legitimate sphere for the exercise of scholastic logic.

"However, if these objections are not really operative, then I accept the Nicene-Chalcedonian interpretation of the Church on these points in preference to the interpretations of Sabellius, Arius, Apollinarius, Eutyches, and all that brood." <sup>1</sup>

The writer continues :

"This, I think, is a wise and justifiable attitude to adopt in our teaching. It means that we accept these dogmas as relatively true : that is, in preference to other rejected decisions on these points. Above all, we accept them as true because of the moral and spiritual nature which they possess in contrast to all the other solutions offered." <sup>2</sup>

"So in treating those dogmas in your sermons I should always advise you to treat them *historically*."

Readers are also told that :

"to deny the possibility of our restating Church dogma is absurd. It is to deny the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church of the age. . . . Shall the decisions of fallible men of any one age bind the Church for all succeeding ages? Shall our decisions bind absolutely

<sup>1</sup> Major, *The Gospel of Freedom*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> P. 86.

those that come after us? Can we not trust the Holy Spirit? ”<sup>1</sup>

Our task so far has been simply exposition, not criticism: to explain the principles and propositions of individual exponents of the Broad Church School, and to give their opinions as far as space allows in their own words. In the chapters which follow we will discuss the value of these opinions and the consequences which they involve.

<sup>1</sup> Major, *The Gospel of Freedom*, p. 87.

# BROAD CHURCH THEOLOGY

## CHAPTER I

### CAN GOD BE KNOWN AT ALL?

IT is characteristic of Broad Church writers to remind us of the narrow limitations of human knowledge in relation to Deity. They assure us that we cannot know. They warn us not to dogmatize. They repeat Gregory of Nyssa's advice to dogmatists, that before men are so positive about the nature of God they should ask themselves what they know about the nature of an ant.

This warning is unquestionably wholesome and wise. But if it has its uses it also has its risks. We cannot leave the subject there. The question is, How far the warning not to dogmatize is to be carried. A purely negative attitude concerning God has no religious use. We are compelled to ask, What positive conception of God can be maintained? What proposition is there of whose correspondence with reality we can be sure? Is there any? This is a momentous question. It enters deeply into modern thought. Philosophic writers of the nineteenth century have had much to say about it.

It has been argued that inability to conceive the Infinite follows from the very nature of intelligence. For the mind can only conceive, and therefore can only know, that which is limited. To think,

said Sir William Hamilton,<sup>1</sup> is to condition : that is, to limit. Limitation is the fundamental law of the possibility of thought.

Mansel put the same idea in another way.<sup>2</sup> The very conception of consciousness implies making a distinction between one object and another. But distinction is necessarily limitation. But it is obvious that the Infinite cannot be distinguished as such from the Finite by the absence of any quality which the Finite possesses : for such absence would be a limitation. Hence a consciousness of the Infinite as such necessarily involves a contradiction. The Infinite is unlimited. And we can only know the limited.

The conclusion thus appears to be that anything transcending the relative can be thought of only as a pure negation or as a non-existence.

Here, however, Herbert Spencer interposed.

"Unavoidable as this conclusion seems, it involves, I think, a grave error. If the premiss be granted, the inference must doubtless be admitted ; but the premiss, in the form presented by Sir William Hamilton and Mr. Mansel, is not strictly true." <sup>3</sup>

"Observe," says Herbert Spencer, "that every one of the arguments by which the relativity of our knowledge is demonstrated, distinctly postulates the positive existence of something beyond the relative. To say that we cannot know the Absolute is, by implication, to affirm that there *is* an Absolute. In the very denial of our power to learn *what* the Absolute is, there lies hidden the assumption *that* it is ; and the making

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of the Unconditioned.*

<sup>2</sup> *Limits of Religious Thought.*

<sup>3</sup> *First Principles*, 1880, p. 87.

of this assumption proves that the Absolute has been present to the mind, not as a nothing, but as a something."

"It is rigorously impossible," he adds, "to conceive that our knowledge is a knowledge of Appearances only, without at the same time conceiving a Reality of which they are appearances; for Appearance without reality is unthinkable." "Clearly then the very demonstration that a *definite* consciousness of the Absolute is impossible to us, unavoidably presupposes an *indefinite* consciousness of it."<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion may not seem to take us very far. It only affirms that an ultimate Reality *exists*. Beyond this bare existence it tells us nothing. It leaves us in the presence of a great Unknown and Unknowable. But the importance of the conclusion lies in this: It suggests that what cannot be comprehended may yet be apprehended.

As J. S. Mill maintained:

"We never have an *adequate* conception of any real thing. But we have a *real* conception of an object if we conceive it by any of its attributes that are sufficient to distinguish it from all other things. Though our conception of infinite space can never be adequate, since we can never exhaust its parts, the conception, as far as it goes, is a real conception. We realize in imagination the various attributes composing it. We realize it as space. We realize it as greater than any given space. We even realize it as endless, in an intelligible manner, that is, we clearly represent to ourselves that however much of space has been already explored, and however much more of it we may imagine ourselves to traverse, we are no nearer to the end of it than we

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, p. 89.

were at first; since, however often we repeat the process of imagining distance extending in any direction from us, that process is always susceptible of being carried further. This conception is both real and perfectly definite.”<sup>1</sup>

It is most important not to lose sight of the fact that this inquiry is no novelty. It is not a thought which for the first time in history has suddenly struck the modern mind. On the contrary, it was very earnestly asked and seriously faced precisely where some interpretations of history would not lead us to expect it, namely, in the great scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages. It is to be found discussed in the pages of Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. Can God be rightly represented by any term whatever? That was their question. Can anything be predicated concerning Him?

1. To that inquiry it must of course be answered that God *surpasses human comprehension*. That is a thing self-evident. We can only know Him through His works, and name Him through His creatures. We can only describe Him by saying what He is not, and by saying what He surpasses. Not a single one of His characteristics can be perfectly and completely known to us. He must possess within Himself many resources which we cannot even conceive. When we think of a man's incapacity to comprehend himself, we are filled with an overwhelming sense of his powerlessness to comprehend his God. It is by God alone that God can be comprehended. For to comprehend Deity is to be oneself divine.

But this acknowledgment is a theological com-

<sup>1</sup> Mill, *Exam. of Sir Wm. Hamilton's Phil.*, pp. 106, 107.



monplace from time immemorial. It was made as far back as the days of Job.

"Canst thou by searching find out God?"

Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do?

Deeper than hell; what canst thou know?"<sup>1</sup>

It was constantly present to Augustine, that greatest of Christian thinkers since the Apostles.

I speak of God, he said. You do not comprehend. If you did comprehend, it would not be God of Whom I should be speaking.

Or again, he wrote that if from early youth to extreme old age a man were to concentrate all his powers on the effort to realize God, it would still be true to say that when he had finished he had only just begun.

It is almost inevitable to quote the famous often quoted words of Hooker:

"Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom although to know be life, and joy to make mention of His name; yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know Him not as indeed He is, neither can know Him: and our safest eloquence concerning Him is our silence, when we confess without confession that His glory is inexplicable, His greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we upon earth; therefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few."<sup>1</sup>

2. But while we cannot hope to comprehend God, we *can apprehend* some true things concerning Him.

That God can never be completely known is a thing self-evident. But God is not the only object which cannot be perfectly known. The limitation

<sup>1</sup> Job xi. 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Hooker, I. ii. 2.

of our knowledge applies to every object upon which our minds can rest. There is not a solitary object in the universe which we know completely or can ever hope to know completely. Everybody will think at once of the flower in the crannied wall, and of knowing it root and all, and all about it and in and out it, and the utter impossibility of comprehension of any conceivable object whatever. But this impossibility of comprehension, of a perfect and complete and Godlike knowledge, does not at all exclude the possibility of apprehension. In other words, knowledge may be real and true although inadequate and incomplete.

Among the reasons why we believe that God is knowable may be set the Idealist argument for His existence. The argument briefly stated is that all existence is relative to mind; that matter cannot be conceived as existing independently of mind; that subject and object are correlatives; that existence cannot be relative simply to the human mind which is temporal; "if therefore that which is not experienced or even thought of by any human consciousness is to have any existence at all, there must be a mind for which all things exist always."<sup>1</sup> Now it is obvious that such an argument takes for granted that the human mind is capable of true thoughts concerning the infinite mystery. In this argument mind is ascribed to Deity. And mind in man is argued to possess similarity to mind in God. And mind in Deity is affirmed to be a necessary postulate without which existence is inexplicable.

A further reason why we are sure that God is

<sup>1</sup> *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 21.

knowable by man is that this is involved in the very nature of spirit. Man is created in God's image. That is to say, he is spirit. And God is also spirit. And there is a real kinship between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. This essential similarity makes God's revelation of Himself to man a possibility. Spirit with spirit can meet. God can make Himself intelligible to man. Man is capable of apprehending although he cannot fully comprehend.

If the mind of man could reach no true ideas concerning God then Agnosticism becomes inevitable. Unless our thoughts concerning Him are true as far as they go, and correspond to God's real self, Religion would become impossible. The infinite mystery would be the great Unknowable. We could not say whether it was moral or not, intelligent or not, beneficent or not. We should simply be reduced to silence. Prayer would become unreasonable: for you cannot adore an infinite mystery of which you can predicate nothing. No Religion can be founded on an Unknowable God. The erection of an altar to an Unknown God is rather a precaution of fear than a product of faith. The Unknowable might be of such a quality as to deserve abhorrence rather than adoration.

When Sir William Hamilton and others accumulate witnesses to the incomprehensibility of the Ultimate Reality they have sometimes omitted to mention the assertion of the same witness to the apprehensibility of God. Thus the famous passage from Hooker is constantly quoted without any reference to the extremely definite and dogmatic

propositions which he accepts concerning God's nature and qualities. Hooker's profound consciousness of the limits of the mind of man, his confession that "our soundest knowledge is to know that we know Him not as indeed He is, neither can know Him," is coupled with an equally profound consciousness of the capacity of the human mind to apprehend certain tremendous facts concerning God's inner life and essence.

Accordingly when appeal is made to Hooker's deep consciousness of human limitation it ought not to be omitted that he could also write such words as these :

"there are but four things which concur to make complete the whole state of our Lord Jesus Christ : His Deity, His manhood, the conjunction of both, and the distinction of the one from the other being joined in one. Four principal heresies there are which have in these things withstood the truth,"<sup>1</sup> etc.

Similarly when the Broad Churchman quotes Gregory Nyssa's warning to dogmatists, that before they are so positive about the nature of God they should ask themselves what they know about the nature of an ant, it ought not to be forgotten that the distinguished theologian appealed to was a profoundly dogmatic teacher ; and that in the very same treatise whence the remark about the ant is quoted, the eternal existence of the Son of God is affirmed to be involved in the very nature of God's Fatherhood, and the dogma of the Only Begotten is definitely taught. These positive affirmations concerning Deity do not mean that Gregory had forgotten his own warning and contradicted him-

<sup>1</sup> Bk. V. ch. liv. 10.

self. They mean that while, on the one hand, he was deeply conscious that God never could be comprehended by the mind of man, yet, on the other, he was no less conscious that the apprehension of God was possible, and was actualized through the Christian Revelation. We cannot fairly quote his warnings and ignore his doctrinal beliefs. He saw no inconsistency between warning us of our limitations and yielding intellectual assent to the propositions of the Church's Creed.

And when another Broad Church writer says that he does not feel at all assured that Infinite Mystery is a legitimate sphere for the exercise of scholastic logic, we want to know whether this criticism applies only to a particular scholastic method, or whether it means that the human mind is incapable of any real knowledge about God at all. Are we to rest content with the term the Infinite Mystery? Has the human mind no power whatever to make any definite affirmation concerning that mystery? If our minds have no such power then there is an end of all religion. It is impossible to reconcile that opinion with Christian principle. But if our minds possess the power to make any definite affirmation whatever, then we are involved in the use of human reason. Either you are confronted with an Infinite Mystery pure and simple, of which the less that is said the better; or with an Infinite Mystery partially revealed, and capable therefore of expression in the terms of human thought.

Insistence on our incapacity to comprehend God must be balanced by insistence on the complementary truth of our ability to apprehend Him. To urge the one without the other is onesided and misleading.

## CHAPTER II

### CAN WE RIGHTLY CALL GOD PERSONAL?

THERE is no doubt a widespread hesitation whether this word "Personality" is appropriate applied to Deity. What is it which personality represents in our own experience? When applied to ourselves it represents, we are told, limitations. Our personality is largely made up of limitations. It is that which sets us apart and isolates.

Some have thought it possible to represent more accurately the nature of God by describing Him as being above personality rather than as personal. So far as this preference is due to a sense of the transcendent glory of the Divine Being and the inadequacy of human expressions it is defensible. Yet the obvious danger of such a course is that it really tends to depersonalize the Deity; to reduce God to a mere abstraction, and to substitute Pantheism for Theistic belief. For after all to talk of God as above personality is to ascribe to Him characteristics of which we can know nothing. It loses the definite characteristics of personality and replaces them by the vague and indefinable. Thus this procedure, undertaken with the intention of exalting Deity, ends in degrading Him. Once

refuse to ascribe to Deity the characteristics of personality and it will be impossible to prevent His being evaporated into emptiness.

Julius Müller said this years ago in his celebrated treatise on the Christian doctrine of sin: "The name of God belongs originally and distinctively to the sphere of Religion, and whosoever dares to use it must do so, not in a sense totally different from or contrary to that in which Religion uses it, but with the clear and reverent recognition that it denotes Personality. If he would express a wholly different conception, he must choose another word."

"But," added Müller, "we by no means wish to imply that the conception of a personal God is unattainable by philosophy. On the contrary, we are convinced that a purely philosophic investigation, pursuing an independent course, will be necessarily led to this conception, and can never without it arrive at a conclusion which will be a secure resting-place for its ever-restless questionings. Never can philosophy satisfactorily explain finite reality, especially in its highest form as finite Spirit, while it refuses to acknowledge a personal principle as its original source. It cannot entertain the notion of an essence above personality, without, when it comes to define it, degrading it into an essence really below personality."<sup>1</sup>

Müller contends that Divine Personality is the specific characteristic of Theism as distinguished from Pantheism; and that this distinction cannot otherwise be maintained. Personality implies self-determination. If God were mere abstract Essence

<sup>1</sup> J. Müller, *Christian Doctrine of Sin*, ii. 115, ed. 2.

excluding from itself all actual distinctions, there would be in God no self-determination by Will. The conception of God as the Absolute is His reduction to eternal nothingness. In order really to exist God must possess in Himself, and independently of any relation to the world, the characteristic of positive self-determination.

Above all things, says Müller, " Religion cannot be what it is; essentially without the consciousness of God as a personal being, self-conscious, and self-determining. Of what avail to piety is a God too high, too abstract and unreal to be personal? Religion is fellowship with God; but there can be no fellowship with an Absolute that is not I in Himself, nor *Thou* for our prayers.<sup>1</sup> Compared with such an Absolute, love (which in the very conception of it presupposes personality alike in the subject of it and in the object of it) loses all meaning; and instead of childlike trust and willing submission, blended with the sure hope of a perfect solution of all problems, we have self-enthralment to a stern fatalism, and to a necessary chain of causes and effects; or self-absorption in the unfathomable basis of all things, the anticipation of future annihilation to which consciousness thinks itself destined."

Pfleiderer's discussion of this question in his *Philosophy of Religion* is instructive because it is a reminder that the difficulty does not only apply to ascribing personality to God, but also to ascribing to God consciousness or will.

" Consciousness is a distinguishing of the knowing subject from the known object to which it stands opposed, and by which it is limited. It does not

<sup>1</sup> J. Müller, *Christian Doctrine of Sin*, *ib.* p. 114.



itself create its material, but finds it presented and given to it." Consciousness then is dependent on a presented world. "In like manner, the will is a form of desire which presupposes a want in the willer. . . ." All this involve limitations. Can it then be transferred to Deity?

"Shall we then," asks Pfeiderer,<sup>1</sup> "under the weight of this difficulty, simply desist from speaking of a Thinking and a Willing God? Shall we deny Him conscious spiritual life, and designate Him only as the unconscious soul of the world, or still more indefinitely, as an active force?" His reply is: "I fear that if we were to follow this suggestion we should get still further away from the truth. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

For as he says, "the self-conscious and self-determining life of man is unquestionably the highest form of life which we know at all." And the principle which produced the human spirit cannot possess the spiritual energy of life in less measure than the human spirit which is its production. We must take a deeper view both of consciousness and of will.

"The usual opinion that self-consciousness is only the distinguishing of the Ego from the non-Ego is not correct; rather is the self-consciousness primarily and essentially a distinguishing of itself from itself: that is to say, of the abiding and continuing unity of the self from the plurality and mutability of its contents. So also the will is not primarily a desire that is directed to external things; but it is self-determination." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pfeiderer, *The Philosophy of Religion*, Gifford Lectures, 1894, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> P. 162.

<sup>3</sup> P. 163.

Accordingly Pfeiderer asks :

“ What, then, can hinder us from thinking these qualities, which constitute the prerogative of the human mind over spiritless nature, as being posited in God in a perfect manner without their human limit ? ”<sup>1</sup>

Curiously enough, when Pfeiderer proceeds to the subject of personality he strongly urges the application of the terms superconscious and superpersonal to Deity. But as he has shown the essential kinship which exists, in spite of its superiority, between the consciousness and will of God and the consciousness and will of man, it becomes quite clear that if exclusive stress is laid on the similarity between the human and the Divine, injustice is done to the immensity of the difference, and God is reduced by the process beneath His sublimity. And yet, conversely, if exclusive stress is laid on the difference between them, injustice is done to the similarity, and God, by an exaggerated exaltation, is made altogether dissimilar and inaccessible. Is not therefore the proper course to lay stress alike on both aspects of similarity and difference between the human and the Divine, while ascribing alike to both in the proper sense the terms consciousness and will and personality ?

Spinoza taught that God is mind but not personality, because only a limited being can have personality. But, as Höffding observes, the same objection which Spinoza urged against making personality a divine attribute may be urged against ascribing mind to Him.<sup>2</sup>

Broad Churchmen sometimes tell us that the

<sup>1</sup> Pfeiderer, *The Philosophy of Religion*, Gifford Lectures, 1894, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Höffding, *History of Modern Philosophy*, i. 317.

Infinite Mystery has revealed Himself to us by the name of Father. We may then apply the term Father to God without hesitation. But is not the term Father associated with limitations? Is it not liable to be misapplied? Can it be taken with all its human and earthly memories clinging round it, and straightway applied correctly to the Deity? Was it not from this very term that Arius drew one conclusion and Athanasius the contrary? Are not Unitarians and Catholics still disputing what is meant by the Fatherhood of God, whether it represents essential realities in Deity, or is simply relative to the intelligent creatures? Fatherhood is no more exempt from misunderstanding when applied to God than personality.

Choose any other term you please. Call God King or Lord or Master. All these are open to objection, and liable to misconstruction.

The truth is that if we are to speak of God at all, we can only do so by human expressions. We have no language but what is human. And all our words have done servile duty, and have represented inferior things. Not one of them but is entangled in human limitations.

If this inscrutability of God were true with regard to the nature of His personality, it would surely apply also to the nature of His moral character. Yet those who warn us of our incapacity to realize whether God is personal or not, seem to take for granted that we are perfectly capable of realizing God's moral character. But it is difficult to see how we can expect to form any adequate notion of the character of a Being of whose personality we are not competent to pronounce.

Are the moral characteristics which we ascribe to God true only outwardly or are they not true inwardly also? Are they not manifestations of qualities which God possesses in Himself, even if He were not manifested at all? When we say that God is love, do we mean only that this represents His relation to mankind, or do we not also mean that this actually represents God's innermost reality? Do not the moral revelations of Deity correspond to the actual characteristics of Deity?

And if they do, if we are capable of knowing God's real moral self, are we not also capable of knowing His metaphysical qualities also? Can we not just as reasonably claim to know that He is personal as that He is love?

How can we know anything of God's moral nature if we can know nothing of His personality?

When we apply moral attributes to Deity, when we say that God is love, do we not mean that His moral character is the same in kind, although of course immeasurably transcending in degree, the moral character of men? Do we not mean that love in Deity is similar to love in man: purified, intensified, elevated, of course, but yet substantially the selfsame quality? Do we not all maintain that the love shown in the man Jesus Christ is the sort of love which exists in the unrevealed God-head; that this revelation actually shows us what God really is in the depth of His inmost nature? If, then, God has shown us what His moral nature actually is, God the revealed is the same substantially as God the unrevealed. We are not to say that God's love is only a manward appearance, but that it is His essential nature. We pass beyond

God in relation to us to God in relation to Himself.

This was the argument of J. S. Mill.

"Language has no meaning for the words Just, Merciful, Benevolent, save that in what we predicate them of our fellow-creatures; and unless that is what we intend to express by them, we have no business to employ the words."<sup>1</sup> "If in ascribing goodness to God I do not mean what I mean by goodness; if I do not mean the goodness of which I have some knowledge, but an incomprehensible attitude of an incomprehensible substance, which for aught I know may be a totally different quality from that which I love and venerate . . . what do I mean by calling it goodness? and what reason have I for venerating it? If I know nothing about what the attribute is, I cannot tell that it is a proper object of veneration. . . . Unless I believe God to possess the same moral attributes which I find, in however inferior a degree, in a good man, what ground of assurance have I of God's veracity? All trust in a Revelation presupposes a conviction that God's attributes are the same, in all but degree, with the best human attributes."<sup>2</sup>

Hence it may be fairly urged that personality is most applicable to Deity. For Personality is the highest existence that we know. Personality includes intelligence and will. If God is mind, what else is He than personal? The ascription of mind and moral character to God seems to carry with it the implications of personality. To ascribe the one and withhold the other is not really a consistent position. Self-consciousness, being that through which alone the Universe is intelligible, must surely exist in God. Where there is love there must be personality.

<sup>1</sup> *Examin. of Hamilton*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 128.

That Personality must be ascribed to God seems to follow from the qualities which Personality is acknowledged to represent.

Whether we say that "a Person is the individual substance of a rational nature" (Boetius, *De duab. Naturis*); or that "a Person is a separate entity existing in an intellectual nature" (S. Thomas, *Dist. xxiii. cl. i. A. iii.*); or that "a Person is a thinking and intelligent being that has reason and reflection" (Locke); or that "Personality is a quality of the human being that expresses his moral nature" (Wallace, *Lectures and Essays*, p. 266); or that "personality is individuality existing in itself, but with a nature as its ground" (Coleridge, *Lit. Remains*, iii. 68); or that "Personality belongs to a being endowed with inward freedom with the power of absolute initiative" (Kant, in Wallace, p. 217); the conclusion seems invariably the same: that a term representing such ideas as these must be applicable to Deity.

"In Selfhood we have evidence of a completer being than any so-called lower kind can give. Hence we view the Universe and the Reality which it represents as being such that Selfhood, ultimately stated in terms of value as Personality, expresses its highest form of Existence." <sup>1</sup>

Personality, then, is "our highest category of explanation." There is in fact "a rapidly growing conviction," indeed it is "almost the last word of present-day philosophy, that Reality *must* be conceived in terms of Thought, Spirit, and Personality." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Merrington, *The Problem of Personality*, 1916, pp. 189, 190.

Thus "only by the postulation of a Perfect Personality can the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness be explained." <sup>1</sup>

Hence the positive definition of Personality will be the Self in the full circle of its relationships. This "gives us a clue to the interpretation of Divine Personality in other than negative terms, and thus removes the favourite objection to the Personality of God as implying limitation." <sup>2</sup>

"The world of relations can be synthesized and known only by a Mind, and so it is required that the Universe be conceived as constituted, as surely as it exists, by the Supreme Mind for whom all things are. So conceived, the Spiritual Principle must be of the form of Subject and Object; for that is precisely the relationship which must obtain between the Universe as existing *for* such a Spiritual Principle and the Spiritual Principle as knowing and so constituting the Universe. But this answers to our description of a Self. Therefore, the Spiritual Principle, whatever else it may be, must be a Self." <sup>3</sup>

It is a distinction of human personality that it is both individual and universal. On the one side, it is individual, exclusive, full of limitations. The self is set over against that which is not self: the thinking subject is contrasted with the object of its thinking. Thus the self appears essentially limited by the very constitution of its nature. Yet, on the other side, personality tends toward the universal, the comprehensive, the all-embracing. It transcends its limitations.

<sup>1</sup> Merrington, *The Problem of Personality*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> P. 209.

<sup>3</sup> P. 187.

Accordingly a philosopher tells us :

"We cease, therefore, to put forward the more elementary determinations of thought, as if they were pre-eminently adapted to express the nature of that reality. We do not define God as Being . . . nor as Infinite Substance, nor even as the Great First Cause. Such determinations, though in a sense true as far as they go, are recognized by a systematic criticism of thought to be wholly inadequate as expressions of the divine nature. They are inadequate, not merely as all human conceptions must be inadequate to such an object, by reason of our ignorance ; they are inadequate even with reference to what we know. We know them to be inadequate by reference to other conceptions which we possess : by reference, in truth, to a conception like self-consciousness, which we may draw from our own experience."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Martineau also wrote :

"The modern scruples that are felt with regard to the personality of God appear to me not less intellectually weak than they are morally deplorable. If any one is fastidious about the *word*, and thinks it spoiled by the Athanasian controversy, let him supply us with a better : but *some* symbol we must have of that Divine freedom in the exercise of Will, the acknowledgment of which makes the difference between Theism and Pantheism, and gives religion its entrance into the conscience and affections of men."<sup>2</sup>

Whatever philosophic difficulties exist I can only endorse the words of Hermann Lotze that "the longing of the soul to apprehend as reality the Highest Good which it is able to feel, cannot be

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Seth, *Hegelianism and Personality*, 1893, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Martineau, *A Study of Religion*, ii. 183.



satisfied by or even consider any form of the existence of that Good except Personality.”<sup>1</sup>

Hermann Lotze argued that so far from refraining to ascribe personality to God, the truest course was to contend that He alone deserved the name. True personality exists, argued Lotze, in God only. That which exists in man is but a pale and distant copy. God simply is the perfection of personality.

Whether the God of Philosophy can or cannot under present circumstances be harmonized with the God of Religion is another matter. But there can be no question as to the characteristics of the God of Religion. An informal abstraction may suffice for the requirements of some Philosophies, but nothing less than a Personal Deity can suffice for Religion.

The personality of God is the condition of all communion with Him, and the basis of all religious experience. There can be no such thing as a solemn hour of communion with the living God unless there exists an essential similarity between Him and His creatures. Of course there is man's nothing perfect opposed to God's all-complete. Of course He transcends the best we can conceive. Nevertheless communion with Him requires kinship and resemblance. Unless He is what we denote by personality devotion is destroyed. God is for us valueless unless He is a being with Whom we can enter into personal relations.

It is a fundamental postulate of Christian Religion that God is of such a sort that His essential qualities can be fully revealed through personality, through the person of Jesus. But how shall we shrink from ascribing personality to characteristics which

<sup>1</sup> Lotze, *Microcosmus*, ii. 672.

nothing we know of except personality can reveal?

The inability of various thinkers to ascribe personality to God explains why their conception of Deity could never become a religious influence. So long as Deity is regarded simply as Infinite or Absolute or Incomprehensible, or Unknowable or Nameless, or Depth or Abyss, or the Principle of Unity, or the First Cause, the conception has no moral driving power. It is exactly in its opposition to all these abstract conceptions that the religious force of Christianity lies. As Windelband says, in his *History of Philosophy* :

“ The development of Christian thought in the Church preserved its impressive energy by holding fast to the conception of God as spiritual personality. It did this, not as the result of philosophical reflection and reasoning, but by virtue of its immediate attachment to the living belief of the Church community, and just in this consisted its psychological strength, its power in the world's history. This faith is breathed in the New Testament ; this is defended by all the supporters of patristic theology, and just by this are the limits of the Christian doctrine everywhere defined, as against the Hellenistic solutions of the chief problem in the philosophy of religion.

“ Hellenism sees in personality, in however purely spiritual a manner it may be conceived, a restriction and a characteristic of the finite, which it would keep at a distance from the Supreme Being, and admit only for the particular gods. Christianity as a living religion demands a personal relation of man to the basis of the world conceived of as supreme personality, and it expresses this demand in the thought of the divine sonship of man.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Windelband, *History of Philosophy*, 1893, p. 238, Engl. transl.

## CHAPTER III

### THE HISTORIC ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

IT cannot be too clearly stated that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity did not originate in abstract speculations on the nature of Deity. It was not the mere product of philosophic thought. On the contrary, it arose as an explanation of facts in Christian experience. It was an inference from the fact of Christ. It originated in Christ's Teaching, Christ's Character, and the Christian Experience.

First there was Christ's teaching concerning the Father and the Son. In S. Matthew xi. 27 the Father is set on one side, the human race on the other. Between them is the Son. But the Son is set with the Father, not with the human race. For He alone comprehends the Father and He alone manifests Him to the human race. And this is the assumption implied continually. The relation of the Father and the Son is absolutely unique. This is the burden of the fourth Evangelist. The Gospel which says My Father is greater than I, says also I and my Father are one, and affirms "Thou being a man makest Thyself God." In the last statement the two previous statements are harmonized.

Secondly, there was the fact of Christ's Character.

It was the Revelation of a serene communion with the Father uninterrupted, nay unshadowed, by the slightest consciousness of deviation from the Divine ideal of innermost rectitude.

Thirdly, there was the Christian experience. Its very essence and peculiarity consisted in being reconciled with the Father by the Son through grace imparted by the Spirit. Redeemed by the Son, Sanctified by the Spirit, Reconciled with the Father. That constituted the personal experience of S. Paul.

If we group together the chief sentences of the Apostolic interpretation of Christ they clearly go beyond any characteristics which can be truly ascribed to a man, or indeed to a being less than Deity. When Adam and Christ are contrasted, the former is described as a living soul, the latter, or the last Adam, is a life-giving spirit.<sup>1</sup> The last Adam: how significant! as one who sums up in Himself the long line of human instances. The life-giving spirit: as one who can impart the power to resemble Him. No mere human being can deserve this attribute. Thus also Christ is the firstborn among many brethren.<sup>2</sup> Nay more: He is the firstborn of all creation.<sup>3</sup> He is the image of the invisible God.<sup>4</sup> He was in the form of God. He counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.<sup>5</sup> Thus His primary condition is Divine. From the Divine He descends into the Human. His natural state is equality with God. It is difficult to realize how any reader of Gifford's

<sup>1</sup> Cor. xv. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Col. i. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Col. i. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Phil. ii. 6.

exposition<sup>1</sup> of this passage can doubt that the Apostle believed the person of whom he wrote to have pre-existed in the essential form of Deity. After that it is not wonderful that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ should be paralleled with and co-ordinated with the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The grace of Christ is a divine principle as is also the love of God.

The principal affirmations concerning the Logos or Word in the Preface to the fourth Evangelist are unmistakable. First the pre-existence of the Word before all other beings. He was in the Beginning. Secondly, He stood in the most intimate relationship with God. The Word was with God. Thirdly, He was actually Divine. The Word was God. Hence He stands to God in a double relationship: there is identity and yet there is distinctness. He is neither merged in Deity nor yet severed from Deity. He is Divine, yet maintains a differentiation in the Deity. "The only begotten Son" is "in the bosom of the Father." Thus the Son is not the Father. But equally with the Father He is Divine. Conceive a desire to express distinctness within the Deity: would it be possible to select terms more appropriate than these?<sup>2</sup>

Now according to the fourth Evangelist it was this pre-existing Word, this only-begotten, Who appeared on earth invested in the attributes of human nature. How, then, is it possible to maintain that the Christian Trinity is a mere Trinity of external appearances or outward manifestation to men?

<sup>1</sup> Gifford, *The Incarnation*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Baur, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit*, i. 96.

For certainly the fourth Evangelist traces back the distinction between the only begotten Son and the Father to their co-existence in the external sphere prior to any manifestation to men, or indeed to any existence of men.

It is clear that the term "the Word of God" in its technical meaning as applied to Deity was gradually filled with deeper contents among the Hebrew people. It passes through three stages. First it is abstract or impersonal. Secondly it is personified. And finally it is personal. In the first stage it was said, "by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made": where clearly the term denotes no more than a Divine utterance or exercise of power. In the second stage it was said, "He sent His Word and healed them": a statement in which the sender and the sent are separated, yet no more is necessarily meant than a personification of the power of God.

More striking is the passage in Isaiah lv. 11: "So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

In this passage the Word of God is set over against God as a related yet almost independent reality. It goes and it returns and it accomplishes and it prospers. It is identical with the Divine will and co-existent with the Divine power.

In the third and final stage it was said, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Here a deeper meaning is reached than in any pre-Christian use. The Word is here represented as personal, personal

in the same sense that God is personal, as distinct from yet one with God.

After all this it really causes us no surprise to be told that this Son of God is the being through Whom God made the worlds; that He is the effulgence of God's glory, and the very image of His substance.<sup>1</sup> All this is in perfect harmony with what has gone before, with the general conception of the personality of the Son.

So again it is perfectly true to say, as Dr. Du Bose has admirably done, that the Synoptic interpretation of Christ can be given, and is indeed summed up, in an ascending scale of meanings of the term Son of God. First Jesus may be described as Son of God in the ordinary sense in which that term is applicable to any other religious individual. That meaning of the term includes a considerable portion of the purely human record of the Evangelists. But while it includes much, it leaves portions unaccounted for by it, and irreducible within the limits of that meaning. Secondly, therefore, Jesus may be described as Son of God in an exceptional and official sense, as being the Messiah. That meaning includes a portion of the Gospel which cannot be included under the former meaning. But this second meaning, like the first, leaves also a portion of the Gospel unexplained, and irreducible within these limits. For neither the purely universal meaning, nor the unique official meaning, yet within the limits of the strictly human, can account for all the characteristics of the Christ of the Evangelists. There remains the third and higher meaning of the term Son of God. It is when that term is

<sup>1</sup> Heb. i. 2, 3.

filled with the highest conceivable contents, when it means nothing less than literal equality with Godhead. And it is only in this way that the residuum of the Gospel, that portion left over alike by the first and second meanings of the term Son of God, can be in reality explained.

Thus Christ is Son of God in all three senses : adoptive, official, essential. Nothing less can account for what the Gospels say of Him.

Out of all this originated the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. That is to say, as has been already stated, this doctrine originates in historic facts and religious experience. It is not the product of mere intellectual speculation. It was a doctrine required to account for an experience. It was necessitated by Christ's Teaching, Christ's Character and the experience of Christian people. All these three departments converged upon the same result ; that Christianity is essentially a Religion whose conception of God is Trinitarian.

If, then, the Trinitarian conception of God is a product of Christian experience, a belief accounting for that experience, men and women who cannot express their religious experience in the Trinitarian way should seriously consider whether their experience is the distinctively Christian experience at all ; whether it is not an experience of a different kind. For obviously an experience may be religious without being Christian.

It is not uncommon to find the Christian doctrine of the Trinity criticized on the ground that if there are distinctions in Deity why are they confined to Three ? Would not a multiplicity be more reasonable ? Without going into metaphysical argu-



ments, the obvious answer is that we are here concerned with a historical experience. The doctrine originated in the facts of the Christian Revelation. The Christian experience necessitated a belief in Three : in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are not here concerned with a conception of the Godhead which arose from purely intellectual speculation, but with the conception which was created by the fact of Christ, and by the consequences which that fact involved.

Thus the historic faith with regard to God in Christendom has been a Trinitarian Monotheism : a conception in which God is essentially Three and essentially One. The Unity and the Trinity alike are the constitutive elements of the Christian idea.

And the function of Christian thought has been to co-ordinate these two aspects of Deity.

Given these two aspects of Deity that God is One and also that within the Unity there are Three, it is obvious that this conception must always be liable to error in two opposite directions. Either the Trinity may be emphasized at the expense of the Unity, or else the Unity at the expense of the Trinity. Either the fact that God is One may be so treated that the inner distinctions are denied, or the fact that God is Three may be so treated that the oneness of God is impossible. The former of these extremes is known by the name of Unitarianism, the latter by that of Tritheism. The one error is called in the Creed, confounding the Persons, the other, dividing the Substance.

Of course it is always much easier to hold one side of a truth than to hold both sides in due proportion. Superficially regarded, it seems so simple

and obvious to say that God is One. Superficially regarded, it is so simple and obvious in the light of the Christian Revelation to say that God is Three. Consequently the tendencies of human thought are constantly toward one or other of these two positions.

But to maintain the two, a Unity indeed yet a differentiated unity ; Three yet a real unity : that is difficult. And we naturally tend toward the easier course. As Hooker reminds us, seeing there are some things more true than plain our tendency is to make them more plain than true. .

## CHAPTER IV

### SUBSTITUTES FOR THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPTION

WE have seen how the Trinitarian conception arose. It did not come about through philosophic speculation. It was by no means the product of abstract thought. Men did not settle down to reflect what form of personality in God was most conformed to reason. On the contrary, the Trinitarian belief took its origin as a religious *experience*.

Men came to find themselves redeemed by Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit, and as a consequence reconciled with the Father. Now they could only account for Christ by explaining Him as equal with the Father. Accordingly, in the preface to the fourth Evangelist they wrote: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Then the Spirit was associated with the Father and the Son in the Baptismal formula of admission into the Christian Community. This was an essential part of the Christian experience. But that association of the Spirit with the Father and the Son implied equality. The relation of the Three within the Unity had to be thought out. The disciples were strict Monotheists. They still continued to be strict Monotheists as before. But their idea of Deity required to be enlarged.

Assuredly God was one, and there was no other than He. And yet He was no bare numerical unity. There were inner distinctions in the Deity. There was no mere Trinity of Revelation, but a Trinity of essence. The distinctions were permanent, eternal. There were Three, neither more nor less than Three.

Then the Sabellian School came with their proposal to restore the doctrine. They said, Of course we agree that the Trinitarian theory states a truth. There are certainly Three. But we prefer to put it this way. These Three are successive presentations or aspects of Deity. Just as an actor on the stage who assumes successive characters remains the same individual behind the appearances, so God on the stage of the world assumes three characters. At one period He appears as the Father, at another as the Son, at another as the Holy Ghost, while of course in Himself He was the same unchanged all through. This, said the Sabellians, is our interpretation of the idea of Trinity, our restatement of the Christian doctrine about God. Will you accept us?

Then the Church gave answer without hesitation. It absolutely refused. But why? Because, with that instinct of self-defence which prompts the creature to guard its very life, it felt that such restatement was a denial of the Christian experience. For the Christian experience was of redemption through the Son, though a Being who was Divine and yet was not the Father. That was of the heart of the Christian experience of reconciliation. A Christ

reduced to something less than Deity was not the Christ of the Christian experience. Christ was the reconciler of God and man precisely because He shared the characteristics of both. If the Sabellians were unable to interpret their religious experience in terms of essential Trinity, that was because their experience, however religious, was not the distinctive experience of a Christian. Their interpretation was different, because their experience was different.

This refusal of the Church to endorse the economic Trinity is justified by all religious history. Over and over again it seems irresistibly clear that when faith in the essential Trinity disappears, faith in the person of Christ vanishes also.

The criticism of S. Athanasius' on the Sabellian was irresistible. Expressed in modern terms it came to this : God, he said, according to you, is a Monad ; the Monad is capable of extension. The Monad extends itself into a Triad. The Monad becomes Father, Son and Spirit. Thus the Monad is the producer of the Three. Are there not therefore four instead of three ? But this extended Monad is the Monad no longer. And originally the Monad was no Triad at all ; for in the period when the Father existed, neither the Son, nor the Spirit, had any existence as yet. This theory of extension in God transfers to Deity the mutability of the Finite. Moreover, if the forms of the Divine Self-manifestation are successive and temporary, there is no conceivable reason why the manifestations should be confined to three. Why not more than three ? Or why not less ? And there is worse to come. For if the self-manifestations of Deity sink back into nothingness, then the created universe may do the same.

The permanence of Him Who took our nature is the guarantee for the permanence of the Christian Religion and the Christian Hope.

## II

Then came the Arian School. It is often viewed as a reaction from the theories of the Sabellian. Certainly the Sabellian treatment of Jesus provoked, and necessitated reaction. The Sabellian indeed did justice to one aspect of the facts. He recognized that Jesus can be nothing less than a personal manifestation of Deity. But he compromised that recognition by identifying Jesus with the Father, and by merging His individuality in a nameless Deity. The distinction of Jesus from the Father is an essential Christian truth. And upon that aspect the Arian seized. Yet was the Arian conception vastly inferior. No philosophic reflections disturbed its equanimity. It was a crude conception of a unipersonal and lonely Deity, Who gave existence to a supernatural creature known to the world as Jesus of Nazareth. Our Lord's pre-existence was indeed acknowledged. Titles of admiration and of dignity were lavished upon Him. The language of deferential regard was indeed exhausted to do Him honour; always with the reservation (mental if not affirmed), that His Divinity was denied. Eternal duration He could not have. He was only the chief among the highest creatures; unlike them in many ways, yet substantially one of their number. Once He did not exist. Between Him and God was the immeasurable distinction which parts the creature from the Uncreated.

The reply of S. Athanasius points out that the Arian argument consists in an inference from the terms Father and Son understood in their ordinary human limitations. No human terms are adequate when applied to God. We must indeed either employ these or none. But in applying them we must remember to divest them of their creaturely restrictions. "If God is not as man is, we must not impute to Him man's limitations." God does not make man His pattern; but man is the copy, and God the original. The ideal of all Fatherhood is the Divine and not the human. Of Him all Fatherhood in heaven and earth is named.<sup>1</sup> Human fatherhood bears the signs of creaturely limitation.

## III

The Sabellian and the Arian theories have vastly more than a remote historic interest. They are forms of that Unitarian Religion which always haunts the outskirts of the Christian Faith, and too often invades it.

To pass from fourth-century Alexandrian disputes to the great English Puritan poet of the Commonwealth is to enter a widely different atmosphere in many respects. But it is to find the Arian theories reproduced. The pages of *Paradise Regained* always suggest Arian presuppositions, and this suspicion is verified in Milton's theological treatises. Coleridge may never have heard of those treatises; but, with his usual penetration, he was convinced that "Milton was undoubtedly a high Arian in his mature life." Milton bequeathed to his literary executor a MS. which, when offered

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iii; 15.

to the printer, provoked the criticism, that it was fitter to be suppressed than published. Accordingly it remained unpublished until 1825. Milton's *Treatise on Christian Doctrine* is Arianism undisguised. The Arian application to Deity of the terms father and son with all their human restrictions; the inference that fatherhood in God involves priority of existence (the crudest of Arian arguments), is exactly reproduced. With a singular narrowness and lack of insight, strange in so great a mind, John Milton could write the Arian sentence: "He who is properly the Son is not coeval with the Father." The Arian theory that God must be like man, and that whether He will become a Father or not must depend upon His will, is also reproduced without apparent consciousness of the Athanasian inquiry, whether God's *existence* also depends upon His will. According to Milton, "generation does not pertain to the nature of Deity." It was therefore perfectly "consistent with the perfection of God's essence not to have begotten a Son." Manifestly then, since Fatherhood in God does not mean reproduction of an equal in nature, the real fatherhood exists on earth and not in heaven. And the Son of God is not essential to the Divine perfection. God was perfect without Him.

So gifted a mind could hardly fail to perceive that, as he strangely expresses it, "if God generate by a physical necessity, He can generate nothing but a coequal Deity." But Milton was too dominated by the human analogy to allow of this. Human generation involves will; therefore, so must Divine. And will involves priority of the willer to that



which is willed. Therefore God's existence must be prior to that of His Son. Generation involves priority, but Milton ignored the fact that generation also involves identity of nature between Father and Son. Identity of nature was sacrificed to priority of existence. For Milton, the generation of the Son meant the creation of a supernatural being, whose pre-existence to the world was allowed on Scriptural grounds by Milton as by Arius before him. But if the Son existed before the world was made, He was nevertheless Himself created. And the Holy Spirit, according to Milton, was another pre-existing but created intelligence.

## IV

The publication of Milton's treatise resulted in two celebrated essays. One was that of Macaulay, who discreetly glided over Milton's theological indiscretions.

Far more remarkable was the famous essay of Channing. It was natural that the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers should feel peculiar interest in the theology of the Puritan poet. It is also true that he exerted over them a baneful influence. Channing himself was quite unable to accept the form of Unitarianism which Milton adopted. More philosophical, and more self-consistent, than Milton, he could not see why the poet, after rejecting the Divinity of the Son, still felt constrained to believe in the personality of the Spirit. These two supernatural creations, the Son and the Spirit, pre-existing before the universe, exalted above all other creatures, yet separated by an infinite abyss from the uncreated, were, to Channing's mind, unintelli-

gible, incredible. Accordingly, in reaction from the Arianism of Milton, Channing fell back on the Sabellian alternative.

God, said Channing, is the Absolute. But of the Absolute we can predicate nothing beyond the fact that it is. Its existence is all that we can venture to affirm. All definition is limitation. The ascription of attributes to the Absolute detracts from the glory and perfection of pure being. This Absolute can neither be discovered nor described. But, admittedly, this passionless abstraction, incapable of definition, is "a mere philosophic unity." It is cold and dead. It is "insufficient to meet the needs of the human soul." Moreover, Scripture implies a Trinity. Is it, then, possible to reconcile the Philosophic Absolute with the Trinity of Scripture and with the needs of man? This is the task which Channing undertakes. The indefinable Absolute, says Channing, possesses a capacity for self-expression. Such a self-expression is the Word or Only-begotten Son. The Son is an "impersonation" by which the Absolute Being is revealed. Now Son is relative to Father. Who, then, is the Father? It cannot be Absolute Being; for of Absolute Being we can predicate nothing beyond existence. Channing, therefore, hit upon the following solution :

"As Christ Himself appears in the finite, He calls out into the finite with Him, if I may so speak, another representative of the Absolute, one that is conceived to reside in the heavens, as He Himself is seen to walk upon the earth. This He does," says Channing in a curious phrase, "to comfort His attitude, or more probably to make it intelligible. . . . Therefore He

calls out into thought, as residing in heaven, and possessing celestial exaltation, the Father, who is, in fact, the Absolute Being brought into a lively, conversible, definite (therefore finite) form of personal conception, and sets himself on terms of relationship with Him at the other pole."

So far, then, we have only Son and Father. What, then, is the Holy Ghost? Channing says that in order to the full and complete apprehension of God, a third personality, the Holy Spirit, needs to appear. Why? Because, while the Logos in Jesus "assisted or set off by the Father as a relative personality" suggests God's character and feeling and truth, so that the revelation of God is made moral; it is not enough for us to have a conception of God's feeling towards us, "we want also to conceive Him as in *act* within us, working in us, under the conditions of time and progression, spiritual results of quickening, deliverance, and purification from evil."

Channing assured the religious that "it must be of the highest consequence to religion that this Trinity be admitted, cordially accepted, lived in as a power: a vitalizing element offered to our souls, as the air to the life of our bodies."

It would require more than this glowing exhortation to secure devotion to Channing's Trinity. For, after all, this Trinity only consists of three impersonations, of whom only one possesses reality, and that one is only a man. The man Jesus, Who calls Himself the Son, "comforts His attitude," and "renders it intelligible" by postulating an imaginary Father located in the Heavens; while the airy fiction of a Holy Ghost, whose relation is

undefined, whose dwelling is nowhere, whose personality is rejected, is nothing more than a symbolical expression for a force or an influence. And this is "the vitalizing element offered to our souls"! And behind all this is nothing but the nameless Absolute, of which nothing can possibly be affirmed except that it cannot be defined.

Certainly the theory deserved the famous criticism that the Unitarian had reduced the Trinity to an abstraction, a man, and a metaphor.

Channing's influence was supreme in American theology for the first half of the nineteenth century. It may in part account for the theological vagueness of Philips Brooks, who, notwithstanding his glorious moral earnestness, is deplorably defective on the dogmatic side.

## V

Another modification of Sabellianism, differing from that of Channing, was proposed by Martineau. According to Martineau, Unitarians believe in one God in one Person; but "with what he is in himself, irrespective of his works, with what he was in any lone eternity prior to the life-giving fiat of his will, they do not concern themselves: they begin with the creation."<sup>1</sup> Prior to that is mystery, and, says Martineau, "where mystery begins religion ends." Nevertheless, while deprecating inquiry into what God is in Himself, Martineau postulates that God is "the great original Mind; one Person, uncaused and eternal"; all of which is to say the least mysterious, and a series of large assumptions as to that lone eternity with which

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *Essays*, vol. ii., p. 527.

they "do not concern themselves." The God, however, with whom their Religion is concerned is God as manifested in the Universe; and the Universe is the "everlasting efflux of his will."<sup>1</sup> The eternity of the Universe is postulated in order to provide an eternal object for the Divine activity, to say nothing of the Divine interest. Now this manifested Deity is called the Son in the Orthodox Creed. If the Unitarian describes the solitary object of his worship as the Father, he really means what the Orthodox term the Son.<sup>2</sup> For both Unitarian and Orthodox intend to denote Deity manifested. The conception of Spirit is founded on the truth that man is not part of nature; it signifies God and man in mutual communion, spirit with spirit. Thus Martineau contends that the idea of "the Father" meaning the unmanifested Deity, irrespective of his works, "is really absent from the Unitarian Creed."<sup>3</sup> "That abstract and metaphysical idea of a silent and unmanifested God is foreign to our practical and positive genius." "We make no advances to the Divine mind till we are spoken to, and then we are too busy with what is said to concern ourselves with the abyss where it lay asleep." "The abyss where it lay asleep": and yet this is the Divine mind, the one Person who is so described. "Of such Fatherhood as that which has no reference to created beings . . . the Unitarian has no idea and no belief. This is not at all what he means when he speaks of God's paternity."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, "the Son" is not to the Unitarian "an historical personage at all," but God's

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *Essays*, vol. ii., p. 533.

<sup>2</sup> P. 535.

<sup>3</sup> P. 536.

<sup>4</sup> P. 536.

eternal self-expression in the universe at large, although concentrated with unique brilliancy in the character of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Unitarian seems rescued from belief in an abstract Deity simply by a deliberate refusal to consider what God in Himself really is. God is assumed to be personal, then dismissed as mysterious, and saved from sheer abstraction only by postulating an eternal universe. Further inquiry is then suppressed by a curious and arbitrary prohibition to think any more about it. We are not to speak until we are spoken to. Such was Martineau's modification of Channing.

## VI

The principles of Channing are by no means obsolete. The students in the Union Theological Seminary of New York are to this day instructed to hold conceptions not essentially different. *Christian Theology in Outline*, published in 1907, containing the lectures of Professor Adams Brown, subjects the Catholic Doctrine to a criticism which issues in the following conclusion :

“ There are three different ways in which men may think of God. They may think of Him as *the Absolute*, the ultimate source of all being and life, Himself surpassing man's ability perfectly to comprehend. They may think of Him as the *self-revealing* one, known to men through His revelation in nature, in history and above all in Christ. Finally they may think of Him as the *self-imparting* one, known through direct experience in the consciousness of man as the source of the spiritual life. These three aspects of the one God, each contribu-

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *Essays*, vol. ii., p. 537.

ting its element to knowledge, and its enrichment to experience, theology designates as the Persons of the Trinity, God<sup>h</sup>the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost." <sup>1</sup>

This form of Sabellianism is really a weaker and less consistent version of Channing's view, for Channing at any rate distinguished carefully between the absolute and its three forms of manifestation. Of the absolute we could predicate nothing whatever beyond the fact that it exists. But here, in this recent version, the Absolute is identified with the Father. Thus the Father denotes what God is: for it deals with God as unrevealed; while the two manifestations of Deity, the Son and the Spirit, have no corresponding reality in Godhead 'at 'all. That is far less incoherent than Channing.

Another significant example in American theology is found in the work of Professor Newton Clarke, on *The Christian Doctrine of God*, in the International Theological Library. He describes himself as "interested" with "the presentation of the conception of God that is characteristic of the Christian religion." He was "not sent to search for God, but rather to report as well as he might what the Christian faith testifies concerning Him." He reports as follows. His theme is treated in three divisions: God as He is in Himself; God in relation to mankind; God in relation to the universe. In the first division is included Personality and Love; in the second God appears as Creator, Father, Trinity, and Incarnate, or in human life. The theo-

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Theology in Outline*, p. 156.

logical significance of this division is tremendous. God as He is in Himself is viewed as Personality and Love, but not as Trinity. His Personality and His Love are analyzed with reference to inner distinctions in the being of Deity. Thus personality in God, as it exists essentially, and apart from Revelation, is made to appear Unitarian; an undifferentiated unity, which leaves no room for Love (and refuses to be philosophically thought out); and, still more, and most emphatically, is not the conception characteristic of the Christian Religion; being, in fact, exactly what that conception is not. Under the second division, of God in relation to mankind, is included not only Creator, but also Father and Trinity. Thus the Fatherhood of God is reduced to a temporal attribute, which found no scope for exercise until the creation of man, being, as the author says, "a tenderer equivalent for Creator." Thus the whole wealth of the distinctively Christian conception of Divine Fatherhood as denoting what God is essentially, in Himself, apart from creation, is absolutely thrown aside and lost, without any apparent consciousness of the irreparable nature of that loss alike to theology and to religion.

And, finally, Trinity is reduced to earthward manifestations, as to whose correspondence with the realities of the Divine Being perfect silence is maintained. And this is offered as a report of what the Christian faith testifies concerning God: the conception characteristic of the Christian Religion. Once more and emphatically this is exactly what it is not. It is only a modernized Sabellianism.



## VII

It is not at all uncommon in modern literature to find such attempts to reconstruct the Trinitarian conception of God. We are told that in a certain sense it is true that God is three, for He has revealed Himself to us under three distinctive names : as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But all this only proves that God is three *relatively to us*. What God is within His own inner being, apart from us, is another matter altogether. We cannot say that these three names which represent God relatively to us correspond with what God is in reality *relatively to Himself*. In other words, the Trinity is an economic Trinity, or a Trinity of Revelation : it is not an essential Trinity, or a Trinity of eternal being. Here it is suggested that we may think of God as self-existing, that is the Father ; as self-revealing, that is the Son ; as self-imparting, that is the Holy Spirit. For the Deity is presentable in all these three aspects to the mind of man. But we must not therefore suppose that these three aspects represent the Deity as He is apart from all relation to the world of men. Indeed, God is only known to us as related to mankind, and we cannot know Him when He is abstracted from this relationship. One writer has gone so far as to say that the Trinity merely represents degrees of consciousness. There is the unconscious, that is the Father ; there is the subconscious, that is the Son ; there is the self-conscious, and that is the Holy Ghost.

In one form or another these interpretations of the Trinity are widely prevalent in the theological literature of Europe.

We have now to deal with the conception of Deity offered to us by a writer of the Broad Church School. According to this conception there are three ways in which God can be represented. First as apart from the world, secondly in nature, and thirdly in the human heart. Under the first aspect we are told He may be called the Father; under the second, the Word of God, or voice, or message; under the third He is the Spirit. It is of course acknowledged that these three aspects are not peculiar to Christianity. They answer to common human needs and experience. Each element of the doctrine is said to satisfy a craving of the human spirit. In Christianity God is revealed to us in these three ways: He is Father, He is Word, He is Spirit. And this is presented to us as a modernized edition of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Now what we are compelled to say is that this conception of God is not in any real sense a Trinity. It is of course quite possible to draw distinctions between God as self-concealing, then as self-revealing, and then as self-imparting. But then it is quite clear that there is no necessary reason why we should call God the self-concealed by the name of Father. For certainly the Fatherhood of God must come under the aspect of His self-revelation. God as Father is neither God apart from us, nor God concealed from us. It is God revealed in one of the profoundest names that can be given Him.

Moreover, strictly speaking, there is no inevitable necessity to call God three if this is all that is intended. It would be just as reasonable to

accept the widely prevalent distinction into two : namely God as Transcendent and God as Immanent. This really covers all that can be said under the exposition recently offered us. So that in that case we are dispensed from any necessity of belief in a Trinity. We can be satisfied with a Duality. If all we meant by Trinity is God unrevealed, God self-revealed, and God self-imparting, it is difficult to see why these propositions should be imposed as fundamental dogmas of a Religion, or why there should be anything essentially serious, still less heretical, in maintaining a Duality of Divine aspect, or if we pleased a Quaternity or a Multiplicity. It certainly does seem to us that to exhibit any real concern about defending, or imposing, or requiring subscription to, such a formula, would show a curious absence of any true sense of proportion or relative momentousness.

Now of course it is true to say that all this is a Trinity of manifestation. In other words, that this Trinitarian form is the method under which the Deity was revealed to men, or was interpreted by men. God appeared to us human beings under these three aspects : as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But, asks the Unitarian, does it follow that the Deity as He actually exists in Himself, as unrevealed, in His own inner life, corresponds with these three distinctions? How do we know that the Trinity is anything more than a series of signs or emblems representing various aspects of one Person? Why suppose that the Trinity of manifestation is also an essential Trinity, that God is in reality three, neither more nor less, and permanently and essentially three?

The answer to this is that it is impossible to do justice to the facts of the Christian Revelation unless we hold that the Trinity manifested under the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit really reveals to us distinctions within the inner life of Deity.

When Christ speaks of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, He plainly speaks of His relation to the Father prior to any revelation of Himself to mankind. The theory of a mere ideal pre-existence does not satisfy the self-consciousness of Christ. Those who regard the Trinity as a mere temporal appearance on earth of distinctions which do not exist in Heaven cannot possibly accept the teaching of the fourth Evangelist.

To confine the Trinity to mere manifestation while denying its essential correspondence with Deity is to reduce it to appearance in place of reality. The Trinity becomes little more than a convenient metaphor to represent divine operations. But there is no earthly reason why it should be regarded as an article of faith, for the whole contention is that it does not correspond with reality.

Attention must be earnestly called to the enormous difference between a Trinity of appearance and a Trinity of reality. Unless we are constitutionally incapable of appreciating the plainest distinction in theological ideas, it is impossible to regard these two conceptions as equivalent. A permanent abiding Trinity in the very Being of the one God, a differentiated personality, wherein there is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in essential and social unity, and capable of mutual

love: that is one conception. A single Divine individual, who shows Himself to men partly as revealed in Nature, and partly as implanting graces in their hearts: that is another conception, and a very different one. No intelligent person can quietly substitute the one for the other as if it made no difference. There is a whole world between these two conceptions. The one is a Trinitarian Religion, the other a Unitarian. What I deprecate is the application of the same name to both, or rather, the taking it from the former and applying it to the latter. This seems to me indefensible, because it is confusing. It glides over immense distinctions as if they did not exist.

Now since the quality of a religion depends on its doctrine concerning God, it is evident that this substitution of a Trinity of appearances for a Trinity of eternal realities must simply revolutionize the entire character of the Religion built upon it. That this is what actually happens can be seen in the idea of Christ and the idea of Redemption which are developed from the principle of a Trinity of appearances. The divinity of Jesus Christ is no longer maintained. The doctrine of Incarnation, in the sense required of the preface to the Gospel of S. John, is rejected. The capacity for sacrifice in the Deity vanishes. The appeal of God to man is no longer the same. The love of rectitude and of mankind revealed in Incarnation disappears, and is replaced by a merely human figure, exceedingly gracious indeed, but involving Deity in no sort of sacrifice whatever. Thus the consequences to religion of abandoning the Essential Trinity are immense.

Consider the difference of meaning in the Fatherhood of God according as the Trinity describes God's innermost nature or only His external manifestation. If the Trinity has no real existence within the Deity, then the Fatherhood of God represents nothing more than His attitude towards creation. If, on the other hand, the Trinity is essentially what God is, then the Fatherhood of God represents an eternal reality within the innermost being of Deity.

Now without asking which of these two conceptions of God's Fatherhood is true, one thing is obvious. They are extremely different. An external relation toward His creatures can never be the same thing as an internal relation within His own personality. There can be no question which of these two conceptions is the deeper and more penetrating. At any rate, they cannot possibly be identified. A religion which holds the one is not the same but a very different thing from a religion which holds the other.

It is a strange and melancholy feature of much modern thought that absolutely different conceptions in theology are assumed to be the same. One conception is dethroned and another installed, utterly different in character, with no apparent consciousness that the whole character of the religion is thereby vitally affected.

Why this Unitarian Religion should be expected to possess the same driving power, or the same constraining and appealing power as the Trinitarian Religion, I cannot conceive.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPTION AND PSYCHOLOGY

WE have considered in the previous chapter how the faith in the Trinity historically arose. We are now to consider what is the theological and speculative justification of this conception of the Deity.

As a preliminary let us remember that to ascribe Personality to the Infinite is the most stupendous dogma that can be conceived. Admit that the Infinite mystery is personal and you have admitted a dogma in comparison with which all other dogmas sink into relative insignificance. No proposition can be offered to your acceptance so stupendous as this. It is incomparably harder to believe that dogma than to believe the dogma of the Trinity. For whether the personality of God is single or threefold is a further problem which only rises on the basis of the dogma that He is personal. Both the Unitarian and the Trinitarian conceptions are interpretations of Divine Personality. Both alike assume the dogma of His Personality. Whatever difficulties a man may find in the Trinitarian explanation of Personality, let him never forget that he has already in spite of all its difficulties assented to the most stupendous dogma of all, namely, that God is personal.

The reminder of our human limits is just. Only let it be consistently observed. It is consistent to affirm that we can know nothing whatever of God as He is in Himself, and therefore cannot know if He is personal : but it is not consistent to affirm that we can know Him to be personal and yet to deny that we can know Him to be Trinitarian. We must take our choice. We may affirm the Philosophic Absolute of which nothing can be predicated except that it exists : or we may affirm the Personal Deity of Religion. But we cannot, consistently, affirm God's personality and decline to consider of what sort that personality is. It is neither reverence nor reason to say that we do not consider God as He is in Himself, and do not speak until we are spoken to, and when addressed are so absorbed in the message as not to consider Him Who speaks from Heaven, and yet at the same time to credit God as He is in Himself with personality. It is not the Trinitarian aspect of God's personality, but God's personality itself, which is the deepest problem for thoughtful men. And if the fact of Divine personality can be revealed to man at all, there is no *a priori* reason why the kind of that personality cannot also be revealed. The doctrine of Divine personality is not made secure by affirming our incompetence to be informed what sort it is. Undoubtedly personality in God must transcend anything that expression denotes in man. But whether that personality, conceiving it to exist, be isolated or social is manifestly a question whose meaning man can comprehend ; and surely therefore a question whose answer God, if He will, may reveal.



One obvious criticism is that this distinction, between God as He is in Himself and as He is relatively to us, between God as unascertained and God as revealer, applies not only to the Trinitarian doctrine but to every other doctrine whatsoever concerning God, and to every term and expression which we can apply to Him. Thus if we say that God is personal the question is, Does this term personal denote merely how God appears to us? or does it represent what God essentially is, and would be whether we exist or not? Now the answer surely will be given that, while no doubt whatever we say about God is necessarily inadequate because it is human, yet personality and self-consciousness do represent not merely our subjective impressions about Deity, but actually describe what God really is within His own eternal being. But if that be true, if the revelation of God as personal corresponds to facts in His eternal being, then there is clearly no reason why the revelation of God as Trinitarian personality should not also just as truly represent His real self. If we are capable of ascertaining that God is personal at all, why are we incapable of understanding the sort of personality He is; whether it is precisely the same as our own, or vastly more complex and comprehensive, in point of fact a Trinity?

But if the other side be taken and men allow that the term personal applied to God only tells us what He appears to be relatively to us and not what He is in Himself, then the Trinitarian doctrine is in no worse plight than any other. For what is signified is that it is impossible for man to ascertain anything whatever about God as He is in Himself.

And whether that conclusion tends more to agnosticism than to religion it seems needless for us to say.

Personality as known to ourselves is distinguished as the power of reducing to unity the various mental elements and faculties of the individual.<sup>1</sup> It is a sort of centre from which all experiences radiate ; to which all experiences converge. Hence Personality is that towards which the conscious individual moves. It is the goal of his development rather than the beginning. Personality is a gradual formation : it is a process. It is always imperfect in man. We do not enter into immediate self-possession. The unifying of our faculties is a result slowly acquired. Absolute possession and appropriation of all our souls is what we never fully attain.<sup>2</sup>

# I

Now it is obvious that personality in God must be free from the limitations of personality in man.

1. Human personality appears as that which isolates. It is a power of excluding others. It seems an enclosure marked off and defined which cannot be invaded. Accordingly people speak of the impenetrable fortress of personality. As Matthew Arnold described it :

“ Within the sea of life enisled  
The mortal millions live alone.”

Live alone, and also die alone. Personality as we know it suggests solitude. It limits, and divides, and separates, and sets the individual apart.

2. But there is another side to this. Personality is that which makes intercourse possible.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wallace, p. 274:

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, p. 275.

It has been described as a capacity for fellowship. It is that which renders its possessor capable of social existence. Personality in isolation is essentially incomplete. It is only in companionship that human personality acquires completion. As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend. Personality develops and matures in mutual association. Human personalities must seek in personalities beyond themselves the corrective to their personal limitations. Thus the unit in human life is the family and not the individual. The paradox "never less alone than when alone" must be supplemented by the fact that temporary solitude is for ultimate social purposes; and by the further fact that the religious individual at least never can be alone, for God is with him.

Thus Personality is not only a power of excluding others. It is also a power of associating and uniting. This is indeed the correlative of the power of excluding. Personality maintains a unity with that which it excludes. It recognizes other individuals as possessed of the same essential characteristics. It finds its own completion in social life, not in isolation.

But here again the limits of human personality are obvious in its companionship with other persons. One person may understand another to some extent, read another's thoughts, realize instinctively another's motives; but at the best this understanding is most imperfect. However greatly it may be quickened by sympathy and affection, yet it is always liable to surprises. It is baffled and bewildered. It has to confess itself mistaken. There were elements in the other's character which had not

been realized. There were motives that were overlooked. There was much which was deliberately concealed. The mutual understanding was anything rather than complete. The question is, does perfect mutual understanding exist anywhere? What cannot be disputed is that it does not exist in men.

Thus the principal characteristics of human personality are power of exclusion and power of association. On the one side isolation, on the other companionship.

## II

When we raise our thoughts from human personality to personality in God we advance from the imperfect earthly form to the perfection of the ideal.

Divine personality cannot be isolated like that of a man. The idea of an essentially lonely Deity refuses to be thought out. If moral qualities exist in Deity, they must be divisible into self-regarding and self-forgetting attributes. The self-forgetting side of goodness must be as eternally characteristic of God as the self-regarding. It is the very essence of Personality not only to separate but to associate also. Its deepest nature is not the power of exclusion but the capacity for fellowship. Man has to find companionship outside his own limited personality. Is it not a true supposition that Divine Personality finds within Himself the social life which human persons find beyond themselves; that God is essentially a social Deity; that in the inner life of the Divine Being there is no isolation and no solitude; that God never was alone; that the Perfection of Personality consists in this very power of tran-

scending by its own inner social resources the inadequacies of personality as found in men ?

This inference has constantly been reached another way, by analysis of the doctrine that God is love. For love of necessity implies an object upon which it can be directed. That object must be personal. For it is persons who are the objects of love, not things. Moreover, love demands an equal. This is to be remembered, because it is sometimes represented that the world or the human race constitute the object of God's love. That the human race is an object of God's love is certainly most true. But an adequate object it is not, and cannot conceivably be. Divine love cannot find its adequate object in the human or indeed in the created. Either there is some other object of God's love, or else no object adequate to the Divine love exists. But that alternative is unthinkable. It would mean that the perfection of the Divine love never was and never will be called into realization simply for lack of an adequate object to which it could be directed. Moreover it seems equally obvious that the adequate object of Divine love must exist within the Divine Personality and not beyond it. For if the object of the Divine love, being equal and adequate and divine, existed outside Himself then there would be more Gods than one. Hence it is within the life of Deity that the love of Deity must find its perfect expression.

That is to say, that to give that wonderful Revelation, "God is love," its proper depth, and its essential meaning, we are forced to postulate the co-existence of distinctions within the Divine Personality. †

There is an idea in many modern minds that the object of the Divine love is the World ; that this object with its infinite multiplicity is an adequate object of the Divine love ; that in the contemplation of it or the sustaining and developing of it the Divine interest and energies are satisfied. To those who take this view there seems no need for the doctrine of an essential Trinity ; for any object of the Divine love within the Divine personality.

But how is it possible for the world to furnish an adequate object for the love of God ? The distinctive characteristic of the Church's doctrine of the Trinity is that it not only affirms a perfect love bestowed, but also a perfect love returned. Now the whole universe, with all its intelligent creatures, can never be an adequate object for a perfect love ; still less can it return an adequate response to perfect love.

Take, then, personality at its best on earth. There is the Lover, and there is the Beloved. And there is the Love which unites them. The illustration is as old as Augustine. But its value is permanent for all time. For if human personality illustrates God at all, it must do so in its highest form. Now the love which unites is, at its best, no mere abstraction. It uplifts and harmonizes the two. Thus a writer in *Foundations* says :

“ Here there is, no doubt, still distinction between the lovers, but the distinction is subordinate to the unity. It is not a sense of contrast, so much as the feeling of unity and reconciliation, which is dominant in consciousness.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Foundations*, p. 502.

Thus the love which unites elevates the lovers, and personality is realized in another than in self.

Augustine's suggestion was that in God is the Lover and the Beloved, and that the Love which unites and is so mighty an uplifting power in human persons is in God actually personal.

Just as it has been constantly felt that the real unit in human life is not the individual but the Family, so it has been also felt that the personality of God can be better illustrated by the Family rather than by the isolated individual. This was admirably expounded as far back as the twelfth century by one of the most thoughtful writers on the Trinity, Richard, Abbot of S. Victor, at Paris. An analysis of human love shows essential plurality. First there is love bestowed upon another. But this expression of love is incomplete until it is met by love and so returned. Mutual love is completer than love unrequited. Thus love of necessity assumes a dual form. But even in this love given and love returned, the complete perfection of love is by no means reached. For there is a third aspect in love. There is what Richard of S. Victor calls *Condilectio*; that is to say, the social love of two bestowed not on each other but on a third. And it is in this *condilectio* that mutual love becomes complete. Thus Abbot Richard saw in the mutual love of father and mother and then love bestowed upon the child the completest illustration which earth could show to the love existing in the Deity. There also, as he maintained, existed a triple love. Love bestowed and love returned and social love directed on a third, and in that third expres-

sion of Divine love is the love of God completely realized.<sup>1</sup>

Then, further, this conception of God as a differentiated personality; of Divine love bestowed upon a personal distinction within the Divine Being; upon a Divine Equal; gives us a Deity of perfect mutual understanding. That mutual insight which is invariably imperfect as between human persons exists perfectly in the Personality of God. In the Deity is God perfectly understanding and God perfectly understood. In Him the mutual imperfections existing in human personal relationships are completely transcended. It is impossible for one human person to know another human person as God knows God.

That is to say, that Personality in God is intelligence possessing at once the power of exclusion and the power of inclusion, and both in the highest degree. There are permanent distinctions within His Personality. Yet these distinctions may be said to be mutually indwelling: so intimate and profound and perfect is their companionship. There is no separation possible in Deity.

Another great theologian came to similar conclusions with regard to the Trinity in a slightly different way. S. Bonaventure maintained that:

(1) The supreme *blessedness* consists in self-communication, says St. Bonaventure. Self-communication in its highest form is the production of an equal.

(2) The exercise of charity or *love* is not self-regarding but self-forgetting. Hence the perfection

<sup>1</sup> Richardi, S. Victoris, *De Trinitate*, Liber iii. ch. xix., etc.



of existence requires plurality, an object as well as a subject.

(3) The supreme *joy* consists in mutual social possession. The highest enjoyment requires one with whom it can be shared. It is impossible in isolation.<sup>1</sup>

The perfection of intellectual life within the personality of God always raises the problem why, then, did He create mankind. Schiller did not hesitate to write the astounding proposition :

“ Friendless was the mighty Lord of Worlds,  
Felt defect : therefore created spirits.”

No less a philosopher than Hegel endorsed that utterance. Nevertheless, whatever is true, that cannot be. Friendless is in the Christian conception exactly what God was not. The creation of human beings was not prompted by defect, not to populate God's solitude and relieve His loneliness. We may wonder indeed why He did create. It is an ordinary criticism that ordinary people are so very dull and uninteresting to us. What possible interest can God find in them ? We may sometimes wonder why human beings immeasurably more gifted than ourselves have taken interest in us. The motive in God, the only conceivable motive of creation, is not defect but superabundance. Because moral and intelligent existence is good : too good not to be imparted and shared.

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, *On the Sentences*, Dist. ii. Q. ii. T. i. 54. Ed. Pettier.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH CONCERNING GOD

SO far we have considered the doctrine of the Liberal School on its own merits. We are now to consider that doctrine *in relation to the Church.*

#### I

Whatever may be said for the opinion that Father, Son and Holy Spirit represent God's relations with us and not God's inner self, one thing is certain : it is not the Historic Faith. It is not that idea of God which has been distinctively known as the Christian. It is not that which has prevailed down the Christian centuries, not that which has been recognized by the Church at any period since the Apostolic Age. It is not that view of God whereby the Church has won its converts and disciplined its saints. It is a theory which the Church deliberately shut out. Therefore whatever can be said on its behalf it has no right to the Christian name. We cannot accept what the Church excluded in the place of what the Church endorsed as if it were substantially the same, with an equal right as its opposite to the title of the Christian Faith. A Trinity of earthward appearances as opposed to a

Trinity of heavenly reality is another Religion, and can by no reasonable means be regarded as the same. A religion is fundamentally according to its conception of Deity. The essential Trinity is one Religion : the economic Trinity is another.

Whatever may be said in behalf of this Broad Church theology, there is one thing which cannot be disputed. It is not the Faith of the Church.

The criticisms which it makes on the Nicene formula are a proof of this. The language of Nicæa is obviously not the language of the Broad Church School. No one would ever dream of expounding the liberal theology in the terms of Nicæa. The language of Nicæa is uncongenial, unsuitable, to express the conceptions of the modernist school. The two conceptions belong to different worlds. The Broad Churchman does not really know what to do with the Nicene Creed. He would manifestly be greatly relieved if he could get it out of the way.

The Broad Churchman's theory of Deity is only a modernized reproduction in a slightly altered form of the ancient contradiction to the Trinitarian belief which the Church repudiated many centuries ago. The Sabellian said there are three successive manifestations of God. The liberal theology says there are three simultaneous manifestations of God. But both alike agree that the Trinity is nothing more than a manward manifestation, and that it does not describe what God really is in the glory of His unalterable being.

In other words, the Broad Church view is essentially the Unitarian idea.

## II

The liberal critics already quoted are, of course, perfectly well aware that their theory of God and Christ is not the doctrine of the Church. But they are not at all disconcerted by this opposition. One of them reminds us that the decisions of the Church are the decisions of fallible men.

“ Shall the decisions of fallible men of any one age bind the Church for all succeeding ages? Shall our decisions bind absolutely those that come after us? Can we not trust the Holy Spirit? ”<sup>1</sup>

That is to say, that the Doctrine of Nicæa cannot become absolute decisiveness. Because it is *the decision of one period*. And the conclusion of one period cannot have the right to bind the Church in perpetuity. Also because it is the *decision of fallible men*.

1. A decision of fallible men. Well, for argument's sake let us admit that view. But fallible men are not invariably mistaken. They sometimes reach conclusions which are right. A critic of the Nicene formula is himself a fallible person. He could not expect to be heard at all unless a fallible man may hope to arrive at truth. The question is, whether the decision at Nicæa was one of the instances in which fallible people were actually right.

2. Why was the Nicene formula accepted? It was not the only candidate in the field. If one assembly declared that Christ was of one substance with the Father, another declared that He was of

<sup>1</sup> Major, *The Gospel of Freedom*, p. 87.

like substance only, but not the same. One declared for equality, the other for similarity. Why did the Church accept the one expression and reject the other? Was it not simply because the one agreed with the Christian experience and the other did not? For the Christian devotion had, from the time at least of the magistrate Pliny, said prayers to Christ as God: accorded to Him an adoration due to Deity alone. And the formula, Christ is of one substance with the Father, was the intellectual justification of the Church's devotions, of the Church's attitude toward our Lord, of the Church's prayers.

3. And further. Remember how this formula has prevailed. This decision of fallible men is vastly more than the mere decision of one age. It was incorporated in the highest forms of the Church's devotion, uttered by the whole corporation, with all publicity, before God and men, and this all over the world, century after century, without rival, without interruption, without faltering or misgiving, with a perfectly astounding persistency and unanimity. It has indeed been objected that the Church has never had an opportunity of revising its decision. It would be truer to say it has never had the desire. There is no trace of misgiving or anxiety to adopt the contrary belief in the great historic Church of Christendom.

4. Realize the implication if that acceptance is false. A decision of fallible men reaching such dimensions and having such a record is at least a serious thing, whichever way you regard it, whether it is false or true, it is deeply momentous. If it is a true decision, then the Christian Revela-

tion has prevailed in Christendom. But if it is false, then the Christian world has been deluded into an agelong persistent dream that Christ was God and that God is Trinity, whereas as a matter of fact both these assertions are untrue. This would be an unspeakably serious thing. Century after century the Christian Church has taught mankind these doctrines, encouraged the world to bestow adoration (which is a divine prerogative) upon Jesus Christ, diverting to a mere manifestation of goodness what is due to the Deity alone. That, I repeat, would be unspeakably serious. It would raise tremendous problems about Providence as well as about the real nature of the Christian Religion.

5. And yet the liberal theologian appeals to us, Can we not trust the Holy Spirit ?

Now it is a singular thing to reflect how differently things appeal to different minds. We must be very differently constructed. For this appeal to trust the Holy Spirit coming where it does strikes us as if it were ironical. For the liberal critic forbids us to trust the Holy Spirit in the abiding convictions and universal consent of the great historic Church of Christendom. We are warned expressly against any reliance upon the unaltered faith of the centuries. We are not to place any confidence in it in the least. These are decisions of fallible men. Where, then, shall we find the working of the Holy Spirit ? Is it to be found in the affirmations of the liberal critics of to-day ? But that, after all, is only a decision of fallible men.

The author expressly tells us that the decisions of the present cannot bind the ages that come after

us. Where, then, is any certainty to be found? According to the liberal theory the Past says it is not in me, and the Present says it is not in me. Where, then, is the guidance of the Holy Spirit? If the Past affirms an essential Trinity and the Present contradicts that affirmation, I should have thought that to refer it to the Holy Spirit was superfluous. For a process of development which is little else than variation and contradiction might safely be ascribed to the unassisted intelligence of men. We are quite capable of doing this without any heavenly aid. We have a positive genius for doing it. It is exactly where we excel. But before I can trust the Holy Spirit I must know where His guidance is to be found. And that is precisely what the Broad Church theory does not tell me.

Of course the development of mankind brings new knowledge and fresh light. Men come to see things which they did not see before. But this does not mean that no doctrine is fixed and sure; nor that all theology is in a perpetual state of solution. We are dealing in Christianity with a historic Revelation: that is, a Revelation made under historic conditions at a definite time. We may come to a deeper and a better understanding of it, but not to a contradiction of its essence; not to a substitute of the opposite of that for which it stood. The liberal treatment of the Church's Faith is ruinous to the self-identity and continuous use of the Religion concerned. And if that is destroyed, once more we have to ask, Where is the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

When Schmiedel said that the effort to rank

Jesus on an equality with God was a noble effort and a natural expression of the value which was attached to the Christian religion, but none the less was a heathen mode of conceiving Deity, Dr. Sanday asked, "Are we to think of history as a tissue of self-deception? Are we to suppose that the natural and necessary forms of human thought at one period melt into mere mirage at another?"<sup>1</sup>

Precisely so. To that very direct and impressive challenge the liberal theology gives, so far as I can see, no real reply. The contrast is most impressive between all this and the Catholic conception of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In the Catholic interpretation, there were certain individuals, call them fallible men, who came to a certain decision concerning the person of Jesus Christ. Left to themselves they were as liable to error as all other people. But they were divinely aided to put a true construction on that Revelation of the Father. This was one of the happy occasions in which men were enabled to reach the truth. Their interpretation of Christ is substantially what will never require to be revised, still less reversed. It was a guidance of the Spirit.

Later on another generation of men undertook the difficult and delicate task of selecting from early Christian literature. They determined the formation of the Canon of sacred books. Call it again a decision of fallible men. But it was a decision under Providential control. It will never need to be reversed. It was a guidance of the Spirit.

There is a third illustration. In a council chamber of the Church there assembled some representa-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sanday, *Ancient and Modern Christologies*, p. 206.



tive persons, call them if you will mere fallible men. They were met to guard the Faith of Christendom against being explained away. They utilized the terminology of Greek thought, which after all is the profoundest instrument of the human intellect that the world has ever known. For after all, whatever criticism may be made, the terms nature and substance and person still hold their own. Our generation at least has found no adequate equivalents. The use of that grandest form of human language to interpret the Incarnation was no accident, but a Providential design. The collective consciousness of Christendom has endorsed that decision. It will never need to be revised. It was a guidance of the Spirit.

Now I submit that this interpretation of Christian history does not vaguely order me to trust the Holy Spirit without indicating where His guidance is to be found. It gives a real meaning to that injunction, and makes obedience possible. It is a self-consistent and intelligible idea. Whereas I fail to see any consistency in the Broad Church view which while it bids me trust the Holy Spirit undermines the security of all evidence, whether in the Past or in the Present.

Some of us have read the volume called *Contentio Veritatis*. No one will accuse that book of being prejudiced in favour of Catholic principles. Nevertheless in that volume the Dean of S. Paul's says without hesitation :

“ The society which Christ founded did not at first apprehend all the truth about His Person ; but it was guided by a kind of instinct (rightly attributed to the indwelling Spirit whom the Father sent in Christ's

name), which enabled it to discriminate as questions arose, and to bar, one after another, all the false paths which lay open on either hand. In doing this the Church claimed, with perfect justice, that she was only interpreting the original revelation, not adding anything new to it.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore when the critic asks us, Can we not trust the Holy Spirit, we answer most certainly we can. And that is exactly the reason why we accept the Faith of the Church, because it was guided by a kind of instinct rightly attributed to the indwelling Spirit whom the Father sent in Christ’s name.

<sup>1</sup> Dean Inge, in *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 69.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MODERNIST INTERPRETATION OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

**I**N a book entitled *What think ye of Christ?* we are offered what is called an interpretation of the Incarnation in terms of modern thought. In such a case it is necessary to give, as far as possible, the author's own words, in order that his interpretation should be accurately represented.

We are bidden to start from our own experience of religious illumination or communion with God as a guide to understanding the person of Christ.

"Setting aside metaphysical questions as to the eternal relation of Jesus to the Godhead, and refusing the classical and material metaphors of the Greeks with their jargon of substances and attributes, of impersonal humanity and self-limited deity, we can use the analogy of our own illumination to help us to realize the sphere and method of His communion with the Father.<sup>2</sup> . . . He lived in constant touch with things eternal. . . . He transcends us immensely. . . . We must reckon it a difference rather of degree than of kind."

<sup>1</sup> *What think ye of Christ?* being Lectures on the Incarnation and its Interpretation in Terms of Modern Thought. By the Rev. Charles E. Raven. [Macmillan. 1916. 4s. 6d. net.]

<sup>2</sup> P. 185.

"Now, that is almost certainly technical heresy, a specific error leading to disastrous consequences, and amounting not merely to a denial of the language of the Creeds, but to a real loss of a vital element of Christianity. We may well be accused of teaching that all men are potential Christs, or of denying the Divinity of Jesus, or, at least, of depriving Him of the religious value which depends upon His uniqueness and unlikeness to us. We must examine these charges one by one."<sup>1</sup>

"There can be little doubt that the substitution of 'kind' for 'degree,' though for the moment it served a useful purpose, was, in the long run, a mistake. For, if pressed to its logical conclusion, it involves a denial of the Incarnation, since a Christ Who differs from us in kind is, however much we may try to disguise the fact by talking vaguely about impersonal humanity, simply not man at all. If He came to give to man the knowledge of God, we must assume that both teacher and lesson are intelligible to us; and if He is not man, this will not be the case, for we shall have no analogy, no standard, by which to appraise or understand Him. There will be between Him and us a great gulf fixed, that ancient gulf between God and man which the Incarnation purported to have bridged; and we, on the human side, cannot then pass over it."

"Nor shall we admit for a moment that, if Jesus transcends us in the fulness of His perfect manhood, and not because He is physically other than human, this is equivalent to saying that all men are potential Christs. Difference in degree merely means that He was very man, and that His union with the Father is to be interpreted under the same mode as ours. It rules out a conception of Him which either removes Him altogether from our species or makes of Him a

<sup>1</sup> *What think ye of Christ?* p. 186.

kind of hybrid, with elements in His nature wholly alien to humanity. It does not mean that we can or could ever be His equals, that our spasmodic flashes are capable of being extended into His continuous radiance."<sup>1</sup>

The author proceeds to ask in what sense Jesus is God.<sup>2</sup> He is the perfect Representative of God to man. "For us Jesus is God." The supreme revelation of God to man is through the man Christ Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

"To safeguard this truth of the adequacy of Jesus is the purpose of the historic definitions of the Christian faith, of the famous *homousions*, and of all those metaphysical elaborations which delighted an age when men thought it shame to confess ignorance. The Fathers, like the Apostles and all Christian folk, were convinced that Jesus was the image of the invisible God.<sup>4</sup> In the course of argument, an argument centuries long, they devised many formulæ to express their conviction and assure its acceptance. They were misled by their belief that the Incarnation involved the physical as well as the ethical qualities of God, that the Deity was to be known as Existence rather than as Love, that they could dogmatize about the infinite. Step by step they pushed forward their doctrines until, though their substance may be true, they are too detailed and too all-embracing to suit the taste of an age which is proud of the humility of the man of science. They enforce upon us precepts as to the pre-existence of Jesus, and of His relationship to God as the Second Person of the Trinity, when we feel that such subjects are within the realm of speculation and possibility rather than of certainty. We recognize that

<sup>1</sup> *What think ye of Christ?* pp. 188, 189.    <sup>2</sup> P. 190.

<sup>3</sup> P. 194.

<sup>4</sup> P. 195.

these forms were inevitable at the time when they were drawn up, that their purpose was to compel upon the Church a belief in the Divinity of her Lord, rather than to display a delight in metaphysics, and that their logic, if logic might be pressed so far, is sound. But we are inclined to rebel against the decree which settles by Catholic authority matters on which human knowledge must needs be fragmentary, which enforces upon us a philosophy and psychology fifteen centuries old, and which makes our membership in the Church dependent upon our acceptance of this decree. Sticklers for exact traditionalism may well be reminded of Gregory Nazianzen's wholesale condemnation of Church Councils, and of Gregory of Nyssa's advice to dogmatists, that before they are so positive about the nature of God they should ask themselves how much they know of the nature of the ant." <sup>1</sup>

"We do not admit that metaphysical doctrines have in themselves much religious value, so long as Christ's uniqueness and completeness are maintained. No doubt they have some independent worth, and a proper place in the Christian scheme of things, provided their importance is not exaggerated. But it is abundantly plain that far too much attention has been and still is devoted to them, and that this undue emphasis is positively injurious to Christianity." <sup>2</sup>

The theory of the Person of Christ presented to us in this volume is that to get a true conception of Jesus Christ we must rid our minds of any such notions as an impersonal manhood or a self-limited Deity. Jesus Christ is therefore a purely human Person. His Personality is not Divine. His distinction consists in the degree of His illumination and communion with God. We all of us experience

<sup>1</sup> *What think ye of Christ?* p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> P. 197.

moments of insight. The difference between us and Christ consists in the fact that His insight was raised to the highest degree and was perpetual; whereas ours is weak and intermittent. Thus Christ differs from Christians in degree only, and not in kind. This appears to be the essential of the writer's theory of Christ.

## I

Now, the first difficulty which this theory creates for us is that it abandons the historic meaning of the Incarnation. True that the writer retains the word, but he denies precisely the very theory which the term "Incarnation" has historically denoted.

For whether we take the phrase, "The Word was made flesh," or the Nicene description of Christ as "of one substance with the Father," or the whole idea of Incarnation as understood in the historic faith of Christendom, the meaning, beyond all dispute, is that in Jesus Christ there occurred the entrance of the Divine Personality into human experience, that the Word, or Son of God, was invested with the conditions of human nature.

The author says that Christian writers "were misled by their belief that the Incarnation involved the physical as well as the ethical qualities of God." At any rate, that was their belief. The historic interpretation of Christ consists in affirming His personal identity with Deity. The new theory consists in denying that identity. Under these circumstances, it is misleading to retain the term "Incarnation." The same term cannot satisfactorily represent two contradictory ideas.

## II

Moreover, the notion of an Incarnation of the moral qualities of God without an Incarnation of His personality is by no means one which carries conviction as soon as it is stated. Is it really conceivable at all? What is meant by the Incarnation of moral qualities? Do these qualities subsist without a person whose qualities they are? Are they abstractions? Or are they transferred, like clothes or ornaments, from a person Who is Divine to a person who is human? Can the moral qualities of Deity be separated from the person of Deity? Is not this an example of what the author calls the "jargon of substance and attributes,"<sup>1</sup> with which he reproaches the Greeks? Substance and attributes, that is, essence and qualities of that essence, are distinguishable in a man, but are they separable in God?

## III

But why abandon the historic faith in the Incarnation? The rejection is advocated on the ground that a Christ Who differs from us in kind, rather than in degree, cannot be said to be man at all.

"If He came to give to man the knowledge of God, we must assume that both teacher and lesson are intelligible to us; and if He is not man, this will not be the case, for we shall have no analogy, no standard, by which to appraise or understand Him."<sup>2</sup>

Incarnation appears to be here rejected on the ground that a purely humanitarian Jesus is intel-

<sup>1</sup> *What think ye of Christ?* p. 185.    <sup>2</sup> P. 188.



ligible to us, but a Jesus Who is more than human is not. Therefore He may differ from us in degree, but He must not differ from us in kind.

But this theory that God Incarnate would not be intelligible misrepresents the very idea of Incarnation. For that doctrine is that Jesus Christ is strictly and thoroughly human, possessing human body and human mind : and therefore thoroughly intelligible to human beings ; while the basis of His being is the Divine personality. Certainly, the Divine side of His being is beyond our comprehension, as is also the method of its union with the human. But the human manifestation is intelligible enough, while the Divine basis accounts for the absolute perfection of the human

If religion is to be restricted within the limits of the easily intelligible by an elimination of the mysterious, the result may be an increase of simplicity, but a decrease of spiritual worth. If we cannot allow the personal entrance of God into human conditions because such a conception baffles our power to comprehend, then we are deprived exactly of that gift which in its very nature is most able to exalt mankind. Christian Religion may be made more simple, but it is deprived of the very essence of its power.

Moreover, this theory is nothing else than Unitarianism. Dr. Drummond, the Unitarian, thoroughly understands the Church to teach that the Sonship of Jesus is unique, not in degree, but in kind.

“ If this absolute distinction is discarded,” he writes, “ and Jesus is thought of as the Son of God through a Divine indwelling which may be ascribed, in however

inferior a degree, to other men, the difference between our views disappears" [that is, the difference between the Christian and the Unitarian conception of Deity]. "But," he adds, "such a view still seems to me entirely subversive, not only of the later definitions, but of the Nicene theology."<sup>1</sup>

## IV

Another reason for the substitution of a totally different conception of Christ's Person for that of the Nicene Creed is that "we are inclined to rebel against the decree which settles by Catholic authority matters upon which human knowledge must needs be fragmentary," etc.<sup>2</sup>

It is very likely that we may feel inclined to rebel against a decree of a primitive Council. But we ought to consider whether that undeniable tendency of our age is a sign of grace or a mere characteristic of a period of transition: to be encouraged as a virtue or restrained as a danger.

And then with regard to Gregory Nazianzen's wholesale condemnation of Church Councils; it is permissible to wonder whether that very orthodox writer would not be somewhat amazed if he knew the use to which his utterance has been put. At any rate, it ought not to be taken apart from the peculiar circumstances which prompted it. It did not prevent him from assenting to the doctrine of Nicæa.

And further, are we not bound to consider why it was that the Decree of Nicæa prevailed, while the Creeds of many a Council more representative and numerically stronger disappeared? Was it not

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Christian Doctrine*, p. 261, n.

<sup>2</sup> *What think ye of Christ?* pp. 196, 197.

because the collective consciousness of the whole Church found in that Decree the expression of its deepest conviction?

And further yet. It is always possible to make an effective controversial use of the confusions and disorders and scandals which prevailed in the council-chambers of Christendom. But if we believe in providential directions of the Church, we shall not regard development exclusively on its human side. What if the Holy Spirit, in accordance with Christ's promise, was guiding the Church into all the truth?

# V

It is as clear as possible that the author's whole theory of Christ's Person is strongly influenced by his profound dislike of metaphysics. Thus he can talk of "the famous *homoousion*, and of all those metaphysical elaborations which delighted an age when men thought it shame to confess ignorance."<sup>1</sup> But it is quite unfair to describe the age of the Fathers in such terms as these. The great theologians of the early centuries are profoundly conscious of the narrow limits of the human intellect. It is S. Ambrose who wrote the famous sentence: "Non in dialectica complacuit Deo saluum facere populum suum." No one can read Augustine's treatise on the Trinity without encountering frequent confessions of ignorance, of anxiety to be corrected by the better informed, of reluctance to dogmatize, of insistence on the poverty and inadequacy of human language and human thought in formulating the doctrine of God. It is Augustine

<sup>1</sup> Raven, *ib.* p. 195.

who said that God is more truly conceived than described, and that He exists more truly than He is conceived.

Augustine also observed :

“ Seeing that many problems exist which no human sense can investigate, and which transcend our experience, no man should be afraid to confess that he does not know, lest, while he falsely asserts his beliefs, he may never deserve to know.”<sup>1</sup>

Men who write in such terms as these ought not to be accused of being ashamed to confess their ignorance. Indeed, the writer himself virtually acknowledges as much when he quotes Gregory of Nyssa’s advice to dogmatists.<sup>2</sup>

Gregory’s advice reveals a consciousness of the limitations of the human intellect, and the great necessity for caution in the sphere of dogmatic truth. But this consciousness and this caution did not prevent him from dogmatizing. Rather, it qualified him for accurate dogmatic exposition.

The author, indeed, professes the intention of “ setting aside metaphysical questions as to the eternal relation of Jesus to the Godhead.”<sup>3</sup> But his own theory of Christ’s Person is really involved in metaphysics, anxious as he is to escape them. For to say that the Person of Jesus involves only the ethical qualities of God, and not the physical, is just as speculative and metaphysical as to say that it involves both the moral and the essential Being of God. To deny that the Personality of

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.*, cxc. 16, p. 1056.

<sup>2</sup> *What think ye of Christ?* p. 197.    <sup>3</sup> P. 185.

God is involved in the Incarnation is just as metaphysical as to affirm it. Either the Person of Jesus is eternally related to the Godhead, or it is not. Whichever alternative you take is prompted by and involved in dogmatic and speculative considerations.

Indeed, it is simply impossible to set aside metaphysical questions so long as you ascribe personality to the Infinite, and to admit it is to be profoundly and irretrievably metaphysical. To admit it is to admit the terminology of the Greeks; a philosophy much more than fifteen centuries old. After all, "person" and "essence" are terms which have hitherto interpreted God to humanity, and they must be retained until adequate substitutes have been discovered: which is certainly not the case as yet. The writer speaks disparagingly of "the classical and material metaphors of the Greeks, with their jargon of substances and attributes." But is this a fair account of Greek Philosophy?

What are we to say of the Personality of God? Shall we disparage the term because it is metaphysical?

If, in spite of all the difficulties, and they are undeniable and immense, which surround the application of the term "personality" to God, we insist on its use, and assert its necessity, we are thereby so implicated in metaphysics that it ill becomes us to disparage its use in interpreting the principles of the Incarnation.

As Augustine truly said, a proposition is not to be rejected because it is reasoning, but because it is false reasoning.<sup>1</sup> Just as all conversation is not

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.*, cxix. 6, p. 519.

to be avoided on the ground that much conversation is false, so neither is all reasoning to be avoided on the ground that false reasoning exists.

"We may have a finite or incomplete, yet real, knowledge of an infinite object. Nor is it possible to believe in that which we cannot conceive, that is, in some measure know."<sup>1</sup>

## VI

Then further, the author insists on religion to the disparagement of theology:

"We do not admit," says the author, "that metaphysical doctrines have in themselves much religious value, so long as Christ's uniqueness and completeness are maintained."<sup>2</sup>

It is, of course, quite true that theology is not religion. Yet theology is the intellectual justification of religion. It is true that too much stress may be laid upon metaphysical doctrines. But it is true that they may be undervalued also. They may be the object of far too much attention, but also of far too little. Neither the English temperament nor the twentieth century is disposed to overvalue doctrine. It is notorious that the age is in reaction from metaphysics, and disposed to take refuge in psychology. It is also a commonplace among some of the ablest of our critical historians that Englishmen are constitutionally indisposed to dogma, and addicted to the practical, even at the expense of principles.

But however that may be, what we want to know is Who Jesus is. If He is only a human person,

<sup>1</sup> Seth, *Engl. Philosophers*, p. 308.    <sup>2</sup> Raven, p. 197.

Who, because of His uninterrupted communion with God and perfection of spiritual insight, is "the perfect representation of God to man,"<sup>1</sup> the question is, Can I worship Him? If He is not God, how can He have the right to the adoration which is due to God alone? Am I not bound to pass beyond Him to the Deity Whom He reveals, but is not? Can I worship the creature instead of the Creator? The writer says indeed that "For us, Jesus is God."<sup>2</sup> For us: that is to say, not truly, really God. For, according to the interpretation given, His personality is not Divine. I am constrained to say that if that interpretation of Christ's Person were true, He could no longer be the object of Christian adoration. Hence the indispensable and supreme importance of the theology. "Christ's uniqueness and completeness" is not maintained unless the Incarnation and Christ's Divinity are literally true. The Nicene language, "of one substance with the Father," is either truth or fiction. It does not simply "safeguard the adequacy of Jesus."<sup>3</sup> Adequacy for what? As a Teacher? as Reconciler of God and humanity? The author does not say. But adequacy is too vague a term to convey a doctrine of the Person of Christ if left unexplained. If we are to "safeguard the truth," we must be far more definite.

The author says that "our religion is sadly weakened by not being sufficiently Christ-centred."<sup>4</sup> We entirely agree. But religion can never centre in a Christ Who is Man and nothing more, as it can in a Christ Who, while perfect Man, is also at

<sup>1</sup> Raven, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* p. 194.

the same time perfect God. It is only the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation which can justify an unconditionally Christ-centred religion.

The terms of a creed may be criticized with two intentions. The criticism may be directed against the terms or against the substance. It may be held that the terms do not adequately represent the doctrine which they endeavour to establish, or that the doctrine itself is untenable. In the case before us, the objection is not only against the terms. It is against the doctrine. Hence it may well be true that the terms are adequate to the doctrine. Given that Incarnation actually took place, are there any other terms better suited to express this fact than those which the Creed actually employs?

## VII

The interpretation of Christ as simply a perfect human person in uninterrupted communion with Deity, a person divinely beautiful in His moral character, but not essentially God, inevitably forces upon us the question whether such a person is necessarily unique. May there not be more Christs than one? The author touches this question, and refuses to discuss it.

"Whether a repetition of the marvel is possible, either in fact or theory, is a purely academic question, about which no human being has much right to dogmatize, or many data for an answer."<sup>1</sup>

But we cannot think this question purely academic. It is in reality profoundly practical. It

<sup>1</sup> Raven, p. 190.



affects the relation of Jesus Christ to the human race. If the Syrian Christ is simply a moral revelation of God's character in a human person, and nothing more, how can He be effective beyond the range of those who hear of Him? How can He be the Saviour of the race? How can He be more than a moral influence and example to that section only of mankind which has the advantage of contemplating His character? Where the Syrian Christ is unknown or unaccepted, may there not be other Christs, other moral revelations of God's character? Why should not Buddha be the Indian Christ? Why should not Moses be for Judaism what the Syrian Christ is for Christianity? Readers of that remarkable book, Herrmann's *Communion with God*, will remember that this is substantially his argument. The Syrian Christ is God *for us*; that is to say, He has the value of a Divine moral revelation for those who come in contact with Him. Other ages or nations may have other purely human persons who are practically God *for them*, just as the Syrian Christ is God *for us*. None of these human Christs are really God at all. There may be numerous Christs for aught we can tell to the contrary.

Nay, more. If the Syrian Christ is only human, is it not conceivable that He may become superseded? Is it not conceivable that the revelation of God's moral character, adapted for two thousand years ago, should require in process of time a new expression owing to the totally altered conditions of modern civilization? Is it not constantly argued that the application of Jesus to modern conditions is a profoundly difficult and perplexing

problem? The translation of Him into modern equivalents is a task beyond ordinary capacity. This is by no means purely academic.

Any one who has followed the German critical discussion of the question whether Christianity is the final religion, realizes at once how impossible it is to prove that Christianity must be final if Jesus Christ is only Man. We have no test of finality in such a case. It is impossible that a standard of finality can be discovered.

Now, all this helps to indicate the strength and stability of the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word or Eternal Son of God. If that doctrine is true, if Jesus is a Divine Person invested in the flesh, then many things follow. It follows that this marvel can never be repeated. It follows that the Syrian Christ is the Christ of the entire human race. It follows that in Him God and humanity are united with consequences affecting the entire human race, and not that portion only which happens to be conscious of it. It follows that Christianity is the final religion because the personal identification of God with humanity is unquestionably the consummation of all possible stages of God's relation with His creatures.

These are not mere problems about which we have no right to dogmatize. They are the necessary implication of the Word becoming flesh. Given the Incarnation as a fact, and they follow as the inevitable consequences.

## VIII

It is with some surprise and much relief that we find the author prepared to defend to some extent the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

“As to the Trinity, there is obviously much to be said against belief in a lonely Monad. Life, human and Divine, seems best defined as the capacity for forming relationships; and love implies the same thing. . . . Many points there are which make the doctrine more appropriate than the circumstances of its history in the Church, or the orthodox defence of it, would lead one to believe. Like many other dogmas of the Catholic Faith, it becomes more and more congruous and satisfactory as we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, and learn to approach it from the right standpoint.”

This is an important recognition of the value of the Trinitarian conception of Deity. We greatly welcome it. The author obviously reaches it on psychological grounds: the hopeless incompleteness of the solitary mind; the self-regarding and the self-forgetting qualities of a moral nature. Nevertheless, the conception is profoundly metaphysical. It is an analysis of personality. And if it is permissible and indeed inevitable for the human mind to ask metaphysical questions as to the eternal relations within the Deity, why should men be required to “set aside metaphysical questions as to the eternal relation of Jesus to the Godhead”?

The position here adopted by the author is a singular one. As a rule, the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation are either held together or

<sup>1</sup> Raven, p. 200.

rejected together. Originally the doctrine of the Trinity was reached as an intellectual explanation of the fact that Jesus is God. The character and claim of Jesus forced the Apostolic age to place Him on a level of equality with the Father, and to expand their Jewish conception of the solitary Fatherhood into a social conception of inner distinctions within the Divine personality. Thus the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity were parts of the same conception of Deity.

The author divorces these. He retains the Trinitarian idea; he rejects the idea that Christ is of one substance with the Father. Now while we admit that as an intellectual speculation, it is possible to maintain the Trinitarian doctrine of God apart from the doctrine of Incarnation of a Divine Person, we cannot conceal from ourselves the singularity of the procedure. What we hope is this: that as the primitive Christian advanced from the Incarnation to the Trinity, so the modern believer in the Trinity will reverse the process and advance from the Trinity to the Incarnation. His belief in inner distinctions within the personality of God should certainly facilitate assent to the traditional idea of Incarnation.

In a very interesting autobiographical introduction, the author explains to the reader that he was responsible at Cambridge for the Christian life of a college which was at that time the scene of a strong anti-Christian crusade. He was the only professing Christian among an able group of critics. His book is clearly an attempt to present the Christian Faith in a form acceptable to them. Our difficulty is that this interpretation of Christ in

terms of modern thought seems to us destructive of some of the precious foundations of our religion. We have written this in no mere controversial spirit, but in<sup>re</sup> defence of what is for us among the mainsprings of our religious life.

There is a passage in Coleridge's *Literary Remains* which is worth recalling here :—

“ The Trinity of persons in the Unity of the God would have been a necessary idea of my speculative reason, deduced from the necessary postulate of an intelligent Creator, whose ideas being anterior to the things, must be more actual than those things, even as those things are more actual than our images derived from them ; and who, as intelligent, must have had co-eternally an adequate idea of himself, in and through which he created all things both in heaven and earth. But this would only have been a speculative idea, like those of inches and other mathematical figures, to which we are not authorized by the practical reason to attribute reality. Solely in consequence of our Redemption does the Trinity become a doctrine, the belief of which as real is commanded by our conscience. But to Christians it is commanded, and it is false candour in a Christian, believing in original sin and redemption therefrom, to admit that any man denying the divinity of Christ can be a Christian. . . . Suppose that two tribes used the same written characters, but attached different and opposite meanings to them, so that *niger*, for instance, was used by one tribe to convey the notion *black*, by the other, *white* : could they, without absurdity, be said to have the same language ? ” Coleridge goes on to apply this to the orthodox believer in the Historic

Faith and to the Socinian or rejecter of the divinity of our Lord. "To the latter it" [the Crucifixion] "represents a mere man, a good man indeed and divinely inspired, but still a mere man, even as Moses or Paul, dying in attestation of the truth of his preaching, and in order by his resurrection to give a proof of his mission, and inclusively of the resurrection of all men: to the former it represents God incarnate taking upon Himself the sins of the world, and Himself thereby redeeming us and giving us life everlasting, not merely teaching it. The same difference that exists between God and man, between giving and the declaration of a gift, exists between the Trinitarian and the Unitarian."<sup>1</sup>

If we cast one final look back on the Broad Church interpretation of the Person of Christ we realize that it not only sets aside or reconstructs the theology of the Church, but also it sets aside the theology of the Apostles. For it no more accepts the theology of the prelude to the fourth Evangelist than it does the dogma of Nicæa.

We realize also that the disparagement of metaphysical doctrines is, quite consistently, not confined to the Creed but extended also to the technical language of the prelude to S. John. This is perfectly consistent. For, as Loisy says, the doctrine of "the Word" is a metaphysical explanation. The term the Word or Logos is in reality just as metaphysical as the term person or the terms nature and substance. If philosophical ideas are to be deprecated in theology the Gospel will be affected as well as the Creed.

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge, *Literary Remains*, i. 393-395.

It is therefore profoundly important to realize the consequences in which depreciation of philosophical terms may easily involve us.

Is it not a reasonable thing to be somewhat sceptical whether the twentieth century is really qualified to set aside the Johannine or Pauline interpretation of Christ and to arrive at conclusions more true ?

Is it not also strange after depreciating metaphysical conceptions to accept the doctrine of the Trinity for psychological reasons ?

Is it not possible after all that a deeper knowledge of personality might bring men back to believe in that relation of Jesus to God which has the doctrine of the Trinity for its necessary basis and which the fourth Gospel implies and the Nicene formula affirms ?

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE OF THE PRE- EXISTENCE OF OUR LORD

THE contrast between Broad Church Theology and Historic Christianity is nowhere shown more strikingly than on the subject of the pre-existence of our Lord. So long as attention is confined to the question whether God was in Christ in the same sense in which He may be in other men or in a sense absolutely and entirely unique, the vital difference between these two conceptions is apparently not always so clear and impressive. But when attention is given to the question whether Christ had an eternal personal existence prior to His human birth, then the momentous nature of the subject becomes conspicuous to any one.

The denial of His Pre-existence has been for some time a well-known feature of German criticism. But until quite recently it found no favour in English writers on Religion. Like many another denial, however, it has been adopted by some Englishmen in the last few years. Not many, perhaps, but certainly some.

The influential Ritschlian School in Germany refused on principle to go beyond the earthly experience of the Christian community, and therefore ruled out as inadmissible all questions concerning



Christ's existence prior to His appearance in history. Ritschl himself declared that "Christ exists for God eternally as that which He appears to us under the limitations of time. But only for God, since for us Christ as pre-existent is hidden."<sup>1</sup> This appears to mean no more than the admission that everything which God contemplates must be an eternal object of His contemplation.

Kaftan, one of the most representative of the Ritschlian theologians, asserts that the pre-existence of Christ is a problem which we can neither affirm nor deny.

Quite recently some Broad Churchmen have adopted this attitude of the German critic toward our Lord's pre-existence. Thus a recent writer<sup>2</sup> deprecates any discussion of the question. He says of the pre-existence of Jesus and His relationship to God as the Second Person of the Trinity: "Such subjects are within the realm of speculation and possibility, rather than of certainty."<sup>3</sup> Not only is the pre-existence of our Lord in his opinion uncertain, but he refuses to discuss it. "We can only urge that we shall be in a better position to reply when, if ever, we know whether we ourselves existed previous to our birth here, and, if so, under what conditions."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless this subject of the pre-existence of Christ is so vital to Christianity that it is impossible to evade or dismiss.

Did Jesus Christ personally and consciously have pre-existence in the eternal glory of God, or did

<sup>1</sup> Ritschl, *Justification* (Gl. trans. 1900), p. 471. But cf. Garvie, *Ritschlian Theology*, 1899, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. C. E. Raven, *What think ye of Christ?* 1916.

<sup>3</sup> P. 194.

<sup>4</sup> P. 196.

His actual existence begin, like that of any other human being, at a definite point of time? Is His personality only temporal or is it eternal? That is the question. Its momentousness is self-evident. It deserves, to say the least, the most anxious and careful consideration. I propose to dedicate these pages to a study of it.

Let us see what place this conception occupied in Apostolic Christianity.

It may be well to begin with the fourth Evangelist because there we not only have the doctrine of Christ's Pre-existence in its maturest form but also our Lord Himself is reported to have affirmed it.

I

It is natural to place first the great utterance in S. John xvii. 5: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

The question is, Does Christ in this sentence assert His actual Pre-existence?

There is a school of interpretation which answers No.

They tell us that heavenly glory may be considered as belonging to a person although that person does not yet exist; belonging to that person by anticipation; already his in the mind of God, because intended for that person to possess when the time of his existence shall arrive.

As an illustration of this view, appeal is made to the words "the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The persons for whom that Kingdom was designed did not yet exist.

But in the mind of God they existed, and the Kingdom was already prepared.

This passage is supposed to show how Christ's words about the glory which He had with the Father before the creation ought to be explained. The explanation is that Christ is not referring to an *actual* existence of Himself in Heaven before His birth in the Holy Land, but only to His *ideal* pre-existence in the mind of God long before He had any sort of actual existence whatever of His own.

We are therefore informed that the words, "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was," simply mean, the thoughts which God had concerning Christ before the world began, while as yet Christ did not exist : the glory which God intended to confer on Christ when the time arrived for Christ to be created. It refers to Christ as only existing in idea and not to Christ as existing in reality. It refers to a thought in the Father's mind concerning Christ and the glory of Christ Who was one day to be, just as a man might think by anticipation of his sons and his daughters while his children were as yet unborn.

## II

Now this interpretation of S. John xvii. 5 is unquestionably most important, and deserves most careful study.

1. In the first place, consider the passage from S. Matthew which is quoted in support of it. "The Kingdom is prepared for you from the foundation of the world." <sup>1</sup> That sentence certainly refers only to an ideal existence in the mind of God. The

<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xxv. 34.

Kingdom, or spiritual reign of God over His redeemed of the human race, certainly had no actual existence from the foundation of the world. It only existed by anticipation in the thoughts of the Eternal One. It had no concrete existence of its own. The passage teaches that the Kingdom of God pre-existed as an idea.

And undoubtedly all heavenly blessings to be conferred on the human race pre-exist ideally in the Divine intention ages before the persons are created upon whom those blessings are to be conferred. Every created thing and person existed in God's mind as an idea before it was created. Otherwise it would never have had any being, whatsoever. We all of us existed as thoughts in God before we came to have any concrete existence of our own.

The Catholic Church, the volume of the Scriptures, the Sacraments, the Redemption by the Cross and Passion, Paradise and the Kingdom of Heaven; all these were prepared from the beginning of the world and existed as ideas in the Divine intention ages before they came to realization.

Hence it is certainly true that the man Christ Jesus existed as an idea in the Divine predestination, just as every other human being similarly existed. This is a proposition recognized in Christendom at least from the days of S. Augustine.

2. But the question before us is what is meant by the words in S. John: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

(1) Here we should notice first that twice over in the sentence come the words "with Thee."

Addressing the Father Christ asks to possess in the future a glory "with Thee." Now that glory for which Christ makes request is a concrete and actual possession. But it is the same glory which Christ had "with Thee" before the world was. Since, then, the phrase "with Thee" refers unquestionably in the one case to actual glory, it cannot refer to ideal glory in the other. We cannot give a different meaning in the same sentence to two utterances of the same expression.

(2) Secondly, our Lord speaks of "the glory which *I had* with Thee." It is glory which "*I had*." It refers to a glory which is as real to the person speaking as it was to the person addressed. It was the speaker's own experience, not only the experience of the person to whom He speaks. It is a glory which was Christ's own actual possession, not one which only existed in the Father's anticipation. We may not eliminate from the saying the element of the speaker's personal experience. To interpret the words "the glory which *I had*" as equivalent to the glory which *I had* not but which Thou didst anticipate and intend Me one day to possess, is to omit that very element of Christ's personal experience upon which the sentence really lays the stress.

If any saint desired to put in words the idea that he existed in God's mind before he was created, would he ever dream of expressing himself in such terms as these: "the glory which *I had* with Thee before the world was"? Can we conceive that S. John would have used such language about himself? Are these the terms in which any one of God's best servants would think of addressing

the Father? Would they not feel that these are not the terms appropriate to express a merely creaturely pre-existence in God's anticipation?

And then conversely. Suppose that Christ had really wanted to put in words a claim to real and personal pre-existence. Could there be any words more fitly chosen than those which S. John reports?

(3) Thirdly, attention must be given to the phrase "the glory which I had with Thee." "Glory" in Scripture frequently means external manifestation. Moses, for instance, when giving communion to Joshua is bidden "put some of thy glory upon him."<sup>1</sup> Joshua was to share the outward signs and indications of dignity, or some additional gift is conferred upon him. It is not a reference to the essential nature or personality. And when Moses entreats of God, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory,"<sup>2</sup> what Moses asks to see is not the Divine essence but some outward manifestation of the Divine. So when our Lord says to Martha, "if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God,"<sup>3</sup> the reference is precisely similar. It is not the Divine personality but only certain indications of His power that is here intended.

In the present instance, the glory which Christ claims to have had with the Father and desires to possess again is not the inward Deity. The essential personality of God can never be resumed because it can never be laid aside. Deity<sup>4</sup> cannot cease to be what it is, but its use of its own powers can be restricted: for God possesses a capacity for self-limitation, otherwise no creature could exist.

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxvii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xxxiii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> S. John xi. 40.

Accordingly the drift of the petition is that the heavenly glory which Christ originally shared with God in His pre-existing state, but laid aside in His condescension, may be granted to His human nature by exaltation. The prayer Glorify me is certainly not confined to the humanity of Christ. Yet, on the other hand, it cannot refer to His essential Divinity. This glorifying of Christ is correlative to the humiliation of Christ in becoming Incarnate. In the Incarnation the Divine glory was not manifested but concealed.<sup>1</sup> It is the glory of His eternal existence which our Lord had laid aside in Incarnation and now asks to resume in the conditions of His manhood.

3. This, then, I believe to be the true interpretation of S. John xvii. 5. It teaches Christ's real pre-existence. But if the passage only taught an ideal pre-existence in the mind of the Father, it would not follow in the least that Christ's real pre-existence is not true, or that it was not claimed elsewhere. Christ's actual pre-existence has been repeatedly maintained by expositors who thought the present passage to affirm nothing more than ideal pre-existence.

And certainly there is no doubt that the fourth Evangelist believed in the eternal pre-existence of Christ. This is certain from the Preface to the Gospel. When the Evangelist wrote that wonderful opening sentence :

“In the beginning was the Word,  
And the Word was with God,  
And the Word was God,”

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stier, *Reden Jesu*, v. 397.

he made absolutely certain for all time his intense conviction that the person of Whom he writes existed with God from all eternity.

There is no need to speculate on Alexandrian conceptions of the term the Word, or to inquire whether in Philo's use it represented anything more than a mere abstraction. The Scripture use of the term is plain, and quite conclusive. The Word of God has first in Scripture an impersonal connotation, then it passes to a deeper meaning and is personified, and ultimately it becomes unquestionably personal. First of all we read that "He spake the word and they were made"; and that "the voice of the Lord is mighty in operation." That is the impersonal meaning. Then we read of the Word of God which goes forth "and shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it";<sup>1</sup> or of the Word of God which is "quick to discern the thought and intents of the heart." That is the Word personified. Finally there is the Vision in the Revelation of One Who is called the Faithful and True, Who judges in righteousness, and Who has a name which no one knoweth but He Himself and Whose Name is called the Word of God. Here is the Word as a living person.

When, then, S. John wrote those immortal phrases:

"In the beginning was the Word,  
And the Word was with God,  
And the Word was God,"<sup>a</sup>

he spoke of no impersonal thought and of no personified idea, but of the personal Word; of One

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lv. 11.



Who is in no respect God's inferior ; One Who not only pre-existed before anything was made, but Who is in the highest meaning of the term literally Divine.

I find indeed that many of the Broad Church School acknowledge that Christ's pre-existence was S. John's belief. In truth they base their rejection of it on this very fact. They urge that the fourth Evangelist, having arrived at the conclusion that Christ pre-existed, was thereby led mistakenly to think that our Lord Himself must have said as much.

4. But in the fourth place, that our Lord actually claimed to have pre-existed in Heaven does not depend on the evidence of this passage alone. There are other sayings in the fourth Evangelist where the same thing is repeated.

For instance, there is the passage where Christ says :

“I came forth from the Father  
And am come into the world ;  
Again I leave the world  
And go to the Father.”<sup>1</sup>

That clearly signifies three things :

First, relation to the Father :

existence with Him, origination from Him.

Second, relation to the World :

entrance into it and departure from it.

Finally, relation to the Father :

return to the Father and the life of glory with Him.

Thus the life of Christ on earth is in this passage

<sup>1</sup> S. John xvi. 28.

regarded as an interlude between two periods of His relation with the Father. And the relation of Christ with the Father before the life on earth is just as real and personal as His relation with the Father when the life on earth was past.

This passage, therefore, clearly teaches the pre-existence of Christ. It strengthens our belief that the words, "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was," teach just the same.

### III

Now this sentence in the Gospel of S. John is of *very great importance* towards an understanding of Jesus Christ. For it means that, in the belief of the fourth Evangelist, Christ Himself was conscious that He had previously existed, and that He taught as much to His disciples. That is to say that, according to S. John, the primitive belief in our Lord's pre-existence was derived from our Lord's own teaching.

But there is an objection raised to this by certain modern critics. They observe that if the fourth Evangelist reports our Lord to have asserted His own pre-existence there is no such report to be found in the earlier Gospels. They argue from this silence of the three against the statement of the one. They remind us of the extraordinary difference of tone and teaching between the Christ of the earlier records and the Christ of the latest of the four.

They suggest that the fourth Evangelist ascribed to Christ the results of his own personal reflections; and reported what he himself believed rather than what Christ had actually spoken.

I. Now on the other hand we must remember

that even if that were actually the case it *would not prove that the doctrine was not true*. It might still be a matter of fact that the fourth Evangelist, by his prefaced reflections on Christ's life and character, on the unique distinction of Christ's personality, and on the implications involved in Christ's words and actions, had found himself driven, under the guidance of the Spirit, to the conviction that Christ had in reality existed, in heavenly glory, before the time when He came to exist on earth. A doctrine may be perfectly true although our Lord never in person asserted it in so many words.

2. But further. It is proverbial that the *argument from silence* is excessively insecure. For there may be heaps of reasons why a thing which was actually spoken was nevertheless not recorded by a certain section of the recorders. It will always be quite impossible to prove that our Lord never said a thing merely on the ground that that thing is not reported by the first three Gospel writers. It may not have been within their scope. It may not have occurred in the incidents which they are describing. They may not have found it in the documents which they employ. And yet for all that it may be quite historic.

But there is this to be observed, that there is nothing in the earlier Gospels to contradict the idea, and there is much which easily lends itself to its support.

3. And further still we know from the letters of S. Paul that the pre-existence of Christ in glory before He came on earth was part of the recognized belief of the Christian community.

Now it is certainly most natural to think that

the reason for that general belief was that it rested on some definite saying of Christ.

#### IV

We must, therefore, turn to the teaching of S. Paul. There are various passages to which reference might be made. One of the simplest is 2 Corinthians viii. 9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." The special characteristic of this passage is that it treats the subject in so plain and practical a manner, that a casual reader might fail to observe how deeply it is involved in metaphysical considerations.

1. S. Paul in these words describes *two periods in the life of our Lord*.

The first period is one in which our Lord was rich. That cannot refer to His experience here on earth. There never was a time when our Lord on earth was rich. That is exactly the very thing that He was not. He was rich can only refer to what He was in a previous state. It can only mean rich in the glory which He originally possessed in Heaven.

The second period is one in which our Lord became poor. This can only refer to His entrance into the conditions of life on earth.

S. Paul has drawn a contrast between two successive states: the wealth of the Divine and the poverty of the Human.

And these two successive stages are the experience of the same individual. They are both the experiences of our Lord Jesus Christ. S. Paul does not, of course, mean to say that the human

being, known as Jesus and recognized as the Christ, had previously existed in Heaven. What he means is that the Self or Person Who was the proprietor of these human qualities and capacities, the Self Who formed the foundation and centre of the being of the man Jesus, had pre-existed in God's glory before the time arrived for Him to make His appearance in human history, here in the world of men.

S. Paul deals with an existence which began in heaven and was continued on earth. He was rich and became poor. He began in divine conditions and continued as human, began in glory and continued in inferiority.

2. Secondly observe that S. Paul *takes this doctrine of Christ's pre-existence for granted*. He does not argue about it, or attempt to prove it, or give any reasons for his belief. When he deals with Christ's Resurrection his attitude is different. There he gives the evidence upon which the Christian belief is founded. But when he refers to Christ's Pre-existence he does nothing of the kind. Why this remarkable difference of attitude? Why should the Resurrection require to be certified and attested while the Pre-existence is only stated and assumed?

One reason is that in the Corinthian Church the Resurrection was disputed and the Pre-existence was not. There were men who denied that Christ rose from the dead. But there was nobody who denied that He existed in Heaven before He appeared on earth. The Pre-existence of Christ was universally accepted in the primitive Christian community.

S. Paul is not propounding for the instruction of the Corinthian believers a theological proposition

of his own. There are such propositions in S. Paul. But this is not one of them. He says as much. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor." You know this already perfectly well. The doctrine of Christ's pre-existence is nothing new to the Corinthian Church. It is obviously part of the common faith, known and accepted without dispute.

There is no necessity to enforce it, because it is believed. Nobody denies it. Nobody doubts. It is held in common by his converts and by himself. It is so firmly held that it is a foundation on which you can build. It is a doctrine from which conclusions can be drawn. The Corinthians will accept the conclusions because they accept the premisses.

There is no reason to suppose that there was any difference in this doctrine between the churches founded by S. Paul and those in existence before his conversion or founded by other men.

It is a pleasure to quote in this connection from Professor Bethune Baker a clear recognition that Christ's Pre-existence was an integral portion of the Apostolic Faith.

"To the author of the Fourth Gospel He was a Person who had Divine existence as the Logos, or the only begotten God, from the beginning, before He entered on His human life. This theory of Divine pre-existence was shared independently by S. Paul, expressly stated by Him on occasion, not as a new doctrine, but as something so generally believed that he could refer to it casually when he wanted an illustration to enforce

his teaching on the subject of Christian humility and brotherly service, and implied again and again."<sup>1</sup>

## V

There is however a serious *objection* which troubles certain modern minds in this doctrine of the eternal pre-existence of Christ. They think *that pre-existence is inconsistent with humanity*. They do not see how a being who pre-existed can in reality be a man. It has been said that a being who was conscious of a life prior to His earthly career, and whose teaching was nothing but a recollection of His supernatural existence, is not human.

In reply to this it must be said :

1. This objection would not convince those who think that transmigration of souls is a reasonable idea. Millions of human beings have credited this. They have believed that men and women existed in a previous life ; that the same soul or person has experienced an earlier career. Would there be anything in such a pre-existence inconsistent with being truly human ? Would it be any answer to an Indian believer in transmigration to tell him that if he has existed before his present life he is not a human being at all ?

Or if a man or woman declared that they had some recollection of a previous state, would that declaration compel us to assert that they had ceased to be human ?

Neither the fact of pre-existence nor recollection of pre-existence is inconsistent with human nature.

2. Finally we must realize precisely what the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence is.

<sup>1</sup> *The Faith of the Apostles' Creed*, p. 89.

It does not mean for a moment that the Infant Christ was aware of His Divinity. What it means is this: that having no idea of His pre-existence during His early years He gradually came to realize the fact.

What is there inconsistent with human life in this?

The question which we have considered to-day lies at the foundation of our Christian belief. Pre-existence is indispensable to the fact of Incarnation. A Christ Who had no existence prior to His Birth in Palestine cannot be the Christ Who came forth from the Father and came into the world, or shared the glory of God before the creation. The Christ Who is the object of the Church's faith is a Christ Who personally dwelt in the Father's glory: one who had the right to say in the sense of real pre-existence, "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."



## CHAPTER IX

### CHRIST'S PRE-EXISTENCE AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO RELIGION

IT has been sometimes argued on the Broad Church side that the Pre-existence of Christ is of no importance to Religion. The doctrine is regarded as a mere speculative proposition, which may be of interest to give completeness to a dogmatic system. But whatever its interest for Theology it has no importance for Religion. We can love God and serve Him and live our religious life equally well without perplexing ourselves on metaphysical speculations so remote from the practical requirements of devotion.

We are now to consider whether this assertion is correct.

#### I

Now let us begin by considering the relation of the Pre-existence of Christ to our belief in the Love of God.

Nothing is more essential to Religion than belief in the Love of God. That is a statement which for a Christian will not admit dispute. Without this belief Christian devotion cannot even exist.

But the question is, How are we to know that God is Love? Undoubtedly for Christians the answer is, We know it through Jesus Christ. It

is a commonplace of Christian teaching that Christ is the Revelation of the Love of God.

But the next question is, In what way does Christ reveal God's love? Now it is precisely here that the problem of Christ's pre-existence enters in.

1. For those who hold that Christ did not pre-exist, Christ is simply a man whom God commissioned. Just as God commissioned Moses and the Prophets for the service of Israel, so He commissioned the man Jesus for the service of mankind. No doubt the special gifts and graces bestowed on the man Jesus were much superior to those bestowed on Moses and the Prophets. But there is no essential difference between them. He and they alike are human messengers selected and sent by God for certain religious work. That is the situation according to those who do not believe that Christ pre-existed.

2. But for those who believe in His pre-existence, the fact is that God Who at sundry times and in divers manner, spake in the past unto the Fathers by the Prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son; that having one Son, His well beloved, He sent Him last unto them; that He spared not His only Son but freely gave Him up for us all; that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

3. That is to say, when these two conceptions are compared, that in the first case God sent a servant, in the second case His Son. The first says He sent a messenger, the second says He came in person. According to the first idea God remains aloof: according to the second He enters human experience. In the first case Jesus is not Divine, in the second case He is.

Look these two conceptions fully in the face and ask, which of these two is the greater revelation of love? Is it the sending of a messenger? or is it the gift of His Son? Can there be a single moment's hesitation about the answer?

## II

In the next place let us see how this doctrine concerning Christ is a claim on our gratitude.

Human love for God is a response to God's love for man. S. John says we love Him because He first loved us. And the response should be in proportion to the love revealed. The greater the love revealed, the stronger the claim on our gratitude.

1. Now if God did nothing more than send a human messenger richly endowed for the purpose to be the instrument of His designs for the human race, then certainly He has a very definite claim upon our gratitude. For it shows that we were in His thoughts, that we were the object of His love, and that He devised this purely human means to bring His banished home.

2. But if God gave His own eternal Son, then He has an immeasurably greater claim upon human gratitude. For in that case He gave the greatest gift to men that it is possible even for God to give; the greatest gift that can even be conceived; the gift of His very self, His own divinity.

3. Now whether Christians show more love and gratitude to God than members of any other Religion is a different matter. But it is certain that they have greater reasons for doing so. Because according to their belief God did not deliver them by the ministrations of a servant, but by the sacrifice of His own Son.

It is this belief in Christ as the pre-existing Son, Who by an almost incredible condescension appeared in human form, which accounts for the fervour of Apostolic gratitude. Recall the splendid outburst of gratitude in Romans viii. 38-39: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But why? What is the basis of his confident persuasion? It is simply because "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (verse 32). This fervour, this thanksgiving, this outpouring of gratitude, is not caused by the Divine gift of a human messenger or prophet. It is S. Paul's response to a gift immeasurably greater: the gift of the Pre-existing Son. I greatly question whether such fervour of gratitude would be elicited where Jesus is regarded only as the chief of the prophets.

It is years since first I read that remarkable acknowledgment of Dr. Martineau in which he contrasts the fervour of devotional language among orthodox Christians with the coldness of the Unitarian devotion,

"I am constrained to say that neither my intellectual preference nor my moral admiration goes heartily with the Unitarian heroes, sects, or productions of any age—Ebionites, Arians, Socinians, all seem to me to contrast unfavourably with their opponents, and to exhibit a type of thought and character far less worthy, on the whole, of the true genius of Christianity. . . . In Devotional litera-

ture and religious thought, I find nothing of ours that does not pale before Augustine, Tauler, and Pascal. And in the Poetry of the Church it is the Latin or the German hymns, or the lines of Charles Wesley, or of Keble, that fasten on my memory and heart, and make all else seem poor and cold. I cannot help this. I can only say, I am sure it is no perversity ; and I believe the preference is founded in reason and nature, and is already widely spread amongst us.”<sup>1</sup>

There is something extremely touching in this acknowledgment of the spiritual value of the devotional productions of a Creed which was not Martineau's own. It is a profoundly moving sight to witness a gifted intellect kindling itself into spiritual warmth at the fires of a shrine where yet he is unable to adore. But it is strange that an intellect so acute did not realize that this diversity of devotional results is caused by the diversity of principles from which it springs. If there is nothing in Unitarian devotional literature which does not pale before the splendid fervour of Augustine, and if its hymns compared with those of Wesley and Keble seem poor and cold, the reason lies in the contrast between the conception of God which the two Religions respectively have presented. If Faber could write those well-known glowing lines of gratitude and love :

“ There is no place where earth's sorrows  
Are more felt than up in heaven,  
There is no place where earth's failings  
Have such kindly judgment given :

---

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *Essays*, vol. ii., p. 375.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man's mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind,"

what was it that inspired him with such rapture and thanksgiving? The answer is perfectly irresistible. It was simply his belief in the Incarnation. The God of the Christian has done for His servants all that the God of the Unitarian has done, and infinitely more.

This fervid expression of devotion is perfectly natural to one who acknowledges in Jesus Christ the personal investiture of deity in flesh, passing through a human experience, and working out in person the redemption of the world. Such language as that whose value Martineau was constrained to own, is the response of the human heart thrilling under the power of that mighty appeal which says in Browning's words :

"Love I gave thee with Myself to love,  
And thou must love Me Who has died for thee."

### III

Thirdly consider how the pre-existence of Christ bears on the nature of sin.

Perhaps at first sight the connection is not so obvious as in the subjects already discussed. And yet it is most real and profound.

For if the forgiveness of sin was conferred upon the race by the creation of a man specially gifted for that work, then undoubtedly sin is very serious.

But if that forgiveness was conferred by the personal intervention of God Himself, by the entrance of the pre-existing Son into the conditions

of human experience, then indeed sin is seen to be immeasurably more serious. For in this case sin is shown to have invaded the very life of Deity, to have penetrated to the very throne of Heaven, to have affected the relation of the Father to the Son, to have involved the Deity in sacrifice, and to have taxed the resources of Divine love and forbearance to the very depth in order to secure its removal. No other conception of Redemption gives so profound a view of the gravity of moral evil as that which maintains its hold upon the pre-existence of Christ.

And if the twentieth century has inadequate ideas of the nature of sin, that is largely due to loss of belief in the Incarnation of God's Son.

#### IV

Finally consider the Pre-existence of Christ in its bearing on Christian worship.

It has been recently said of Christ that "if for some liberal Christians He is no longer God in quite the same sense as He is for orthodoxy, yet to them, too, He has the 'value' of God."<sup>1</sup>

But this is a confusion between two things which are absolutely distinct. If Christ, did not pre-exist, then His personality is simply human. If He did, it was as the everlasting Son, and His personality is divine.

But the religious attitude, the devotional attitude, of a Christian towards Christ cannot in both cases be the same. It must be something altogether different according as Christ is the one or the other.

A person who is simply human may deserve your

<sup>1</sup> Bethune Baker, *The Faith of the Apostles' Creed*, p. 189.

loyalty, your admiration, your reverence, your love, your gratitude. You may be under deep obligations to him. But however singularly gifted he may be with many gifts of the Holy Ghost, however close his converse with the Deity, you may not, you dare not, bestow upon him allegiance of the highest kind.

But the attitude which is due to the purely Divine is this : It is absolute and unqualified self-surrender of all our powers and resources ; it is worship summed up in the term adoration. And adoration is the prerogative of Deity.

If Jesus Christ is for some liberal individuals in modern life no longer God in quite the same sense as He is for orthodoxy, that really means that for them He is not God at all. He is simply a man who represents God's character, so far as that can be represented by one who is not divine.

But in that case it would be absolutely wrong to worship Him. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. A Jesus Who was conscious that He was nothing else than a man richly endowed with spiritual gifts and graces would repudiate with horror an adoration due to God alone. His intimate knowledge of things divine would make Him the first to say, See thou do it not, I am thy fellow servant. Worship God. It must be so. The Unitarian instinct is here profoundly true. The closer the proximity of the human spirit to the Divine, the more profoundly conscious it must be of its inferiority.

In other words, this question whether the personality of Jesus is human or divine is that upon which all devotion to Jesus Christ depends.



We must be perfectly clear on this. It is misleading to say that Christ as a human person is "no longer God in quite the same sense." There are no degrees in Deity. Either a person is God or else he is not. There are no stages of development from one into the other.

Now for the Universal Church Jesus is God. Hence in the early days it sang to Him hymns as God. Hence the Church can adore Him in the ancient words :

"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ ;  
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father."

## CHAPTER X

### HUMILITY BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE PRE-EXISTING CHRIST

WE have seen that the pre-existence of Christ is fundamental to Religion. We are now to see that it is also fundamental to Christian morals.

It will hardly be disputed that one of the most distinctively Christian virtues is Humility. With the sole exception of love there is nothing more profoundly characteristic of Christianity.

Suppose, then, you have to teach the virtue of Humility. Upon what foundations will you base it ?

#### I

The general arguments for Humility may be grouped as three.

We may say that it is our true relation to others. Pride and arrogance are assumptions of superiority over others which is false to the fundamental equality of all human beings. Beneath all the external distinctions which separate class from class and man from man is the identity of our nature. Our common frailty, our common mortality, make pride and arrogancy tragically inappropriate.

We may say next that Humility is the true esti-

mate of self. Whenever we encounter arrogance in another person we are convinced that it is due to lack of true self-knowledge. And doubtless other people feel the same when they see pride in us. This arrogance is because he fails to realize his defects. He thinks himself to be what in fact he is not. He sets before himself a glorified fancy picture of himself in the mirror of his self-esteem. But what he contemplates and admires is not himself at all but a pure picture of the imagination. If only he saw himself as he is he would be forced into humility.

We may urge once more that Humility is necessary for any man in regard to God. For the moment we begin to pride ourselves on any distinction we may possess, the Apostolic challenge confronts us, What hast thou that thou didst not receive? God for His own purposes has endowed you with this gift which He has refused to another. Is that to your credit? Was it a reward of your merit? Or given before you had any sort of merit to reward?

These three are the common ordinary grounds on which Humility is generally encouraged. It is the right relation to others, to self and to God.

These arguments are all effective and convincing. They are principles of the Christian Religion. But they are not peculiar to Christianity. They are the common property of all religions.

Undoubtedly an Apostle may urge us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly. But the advocate of any other religion might do the same. A Jew or Mohammedan might adopt these very expressions.

Is there any reason for Humility peculiar to and distinctive of the Christian Religion? Yes, certainly there is. The distinctively Christian reason for Humility is the conduct of Jesus Christ. That is what no Christian will dispute.

## II

When S. Paul desired to teach the Philippian Church Humility he appealed to the example of Christ. But consider what it was precisely in Christ to which S. Paul appealed. The Apostle did not appeal simply to the conduct of Christ on earth, but to *the example of the pre-existing Christ in Heaven*. It is this which is the remarkable feature of S. Paul's appeal: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God; He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant." <sup>1</sup>

In this sentence S. Paul contrasts the form of a servant with the form of God. The form of a servant means the conditions of life as human. The form of God means the conditions of life as divine.

Christ's original state was in the form of God. He existed under the conditions of Deity. But those glorious conditions, that state of equality with God, Christ did not cling to and prize in selfish delight at His own transcendent advantages. He did exactly the contrary. He took the form of a servant. He reduced Himself to life under human conditions. He exchanged the higher state for the lower. He descended lower and lower yet. He accepted the consequences of

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii.

that condescension. He refused no depth of humiliation. He submitted Himself freely to the experience of mortality, even death under its most humiliating form. "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross."

There, says S. Paul, you have the example of Christ's Humility. It was all voluntary. There was no compulsion. He need never have died: He need never have come. That experience of mortality, which you and every human being would if possible escape, He took of His own willing condescension. The conduct of the pre-existing Christ: that is the example for a Christian.

The moral lesson, therefore, is most plain and most convincing. Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus. As is the Master, so must the disciple be. The mind of the Master is all condescension and humility. You can only be His disciple on the condition of resembling Him. Christ and pride can no more agree together than light and darkness. Christ is theirs who are humble.

### III

We see, then, that S. Paul bases the virtue of Humility on the conduct of Christ pre-existing with the Father in Heaven. There are, however, certain advocates of the Broad Church School who object to this Apostolic method. They deprecate founding Humility on Christ's pre-existence. They would prefer to base Humility on the conduct of Christ on earth. They consider that this course of action would be safer and more convincing: safer because it avoids the problems of speculative

dogmatics; more convincing because it is within the limits of the purely human, which is what we can best appreciate.

Instead, therefore, of S. Paul's appeal to the Pre-existing Christ there would be simply an appeal to the behaviour of Mary's Son, irrespective of any question about His Divinity.

Jesus, then, was a very humble-minded man, Who regarded all other persons as being, to say the least, His equals. He is a beautiful example of humility. A striking instance of this humility is that when He was offered an earthly throne He positively refused it.

And it has been asserted that the lesson can be drawn much more easily from the fact that He refused the throne of earth than from the theory that He relinquished the throne of Heaven.

That is the Broad Church view. But it lies open to very serious difficulties.

1. It is true that Jesus, regarded simply as a man, is an example of Humility. But it is also true that His humility had peculiar characteristics of its own. When He said, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of spirit, and ye shall find rest to your souls," He said what we accept from Him, but would tolerate from no one else. It belongs to His uniqueness. It is certainly not for imitation. The Gospel record is pervaded by that peculiar strain of individuality which is commonly described as the self-assertion of Jesus Christ. He is not content with pointing men to God. He draws them to Himself. It is not simply, Go to My Father. It is, Come unto Me. He is constantly making claims of a relation to the Father which sets Him apart

from men. No human being can copy the humility of the man Jesus without qualification and without reserve. For no human being can adopt the language which Jesus uttered about Himself.

2. But further than this. Christ's refusal of an earthly throne is no proof whatever of His Humility. For the question is, Why did He refuse? Was it because He thought it was too good for Him? or because He thought Himself too good for it? Can we doubt that it was the latter, not the former? Christ refused an earthly throne because He aspired to something immeasurably higher. Neither the presidency of Jerusalem nor the throne of the Roman Empire could have satisfied the aspiration of Jesus Christ. He aspired to a spiritual dominion, an enthronement over the consciences of humanity. Consequently His refusal of the external empire is only His judgment on the thing's inferiority. It is not the slightest proof of His Humility.

3. But now compare together the refusal of an earthly throne with the condescension of the pre-existing Christ. Broad Churchmen sometimes call the former a fact and the latter a theory. Does this mean that everything outside history is only theory? Then God is a theory as well as the pre-existence of Christ. But is not God a fact?

Of course if the pre-existence of Christ is not a fact but only a fiction, then undoubtedly we cannot base the virtue of humility upon conduct which never happened. Neither could we base our hope of immortality on God if God were a theory and not a fact. We should have to make the best of it. And since we could not base Humility on Christ's conduct in Heaven we should have to base

it exclusively on Christ's conduct here on earth.

Only do let us realize that this basis is not the same thing. For consider, which is the greater example of Humility? Is it a man's refusal of an earthly throne? Or is it the condescension of the Deity? Charles V resigned a throne and entered a monastery. Call it Humility if you will. Is it on a level with the conduct of a Being Who is literally Divine (for this is S. Paul's argument) and yet divested Himself of His glorious estate in order to assume the lowliness of the creature? Think of it. The apostolic conception is that—

“He came down to earth from Heaven,  
Who is God and Lord of all.”

He, the Supreme of all existence, endowed with all the prerogatives of Deity, condescended to the levels of His own creatures, clothed Himself in their conditions, placed Himself within their reach, submitted at their hands to indescribable humiliations.

Is it not a thing self-evident that no refusal of an earthly throne can be as great an act of condescension as the Incarnation and the Death of Jesus the Son of God?

There is obviously something stupendous, almost inconceivable in the one which is entirely absent in the other. The one reveals a characteristic of Deity which the other does not. The one is a declaration of capacity for condescension within the personality of the Eternal, while the other shows nothing more than capacity for condescension in a man: very noble, doubtless, but separated by an impassable abyss from that nobleness and



sublimity which belongs to the Apostolic conception of the condescension of the pre-existing Christ.

#### IV

When we are invited to substitute the condescension of a man for the condescension of God as an incentive to and example of Humility, we cannot conceal our misgivings whether the force of the example can be reasonably expected to be the same. If examples are effective in proportion to their sublimity, there is no reason why the conduct of a man on earth should be as powerful an incentive to Humility as the conduct of God in Heaven.

It is a certain fact that belief in the pre-existing Christ and the condescension of God has been the real promoter of humility among Christians down the centuries. The lives of the saints, their instructions on this virtue, prove the overwhelming effect of this Apostolic and traditional belief. Whenever appeal was made to the Humility of Christ on earth there was always the recollection that this was the conduct of One Who had previously lived in Heaven. Whatever stress was laid on details of Humility in the behaviour of Mary's Son, these were regarded as nothing more than temporal consequences of His original condescension. This conception pervaded and dominated all Christian thought and contemplation. It was because they believed that the Son of God had, as a simple fact, done this almost inconceivable thing, that they felt that no condescension of theirs could be too great if they were to be indeed worthy of being accounted among the number of His disciples. The influence of this

great conception on the devout can scarcely be exaggerated.

Augustine did not hesitate to propose in the troubles of the African schism that the Bishops should resign their sees for the sake of unity. He urged it on the ground of the condescension of the Pre-existing Christ. For can we hesitate to offer to our Redeemer the offering of Humility? If He descended from Heaven in human form in order that we might become His members, should we fear to come down from our thrones, lest His members should be torn by cruel schism? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* cxxviii. 3, p. 565.

## CHAPTER XI

### GENEROSITY BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE PRE-EXISTING CHRIST

CHRISTIAN morality, according to S. Paul, is simply founded on doctrine concerning Christ. It is not a mere abstract theory of human conduct. It is not a code of duties existing independently of Christ. It is not simply derived from Christ's teaching. It does not even consist in the example which Christ set while He lived in Palestine, but on something deeper and far more wonderful, namely, the character which Christ showed by His Incarnation.

We have seen how S. Paul bases the virtue of Humility on the example of condescension shown by the pre-existing Christ.

But Humility is not the only virtue which S. Paul founds on the conduct of the pre-existing Christ.

When S. Paul wrote the sentence, "ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor,"<sup>1</sup> he was not concerned with instructing the Corinthian Church in the doctrine of Christ's Pre-existence,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 9.

but rather with drawing the practical and moral conclusions which the conduct of the Pre-existing Christ enforced on those who believe in Him.

He is here concerned with Christian generosity and liberality toward the poor.

He calls on the Corinthian Churchmen to give freely to other men's support.

And in order to give them the strongest inducement possible to fulfil this moral duty he appeals to the pre-existence of Christ. He does not appeal to anything which Christ did on earth, but to something which He did while still in Heaven.

Now it may be said without any fear of contradiction that this is exactly what many modern Christians would not have done. No doubt many modern Christians would appeal to the example of Christ in His daily ministrations here on earth. They would point to His unselfish use of power, His unfailing sympathy, His inexhaustible generosity towards every human being in distress. But it would not occur to them to appeal for the support of some charitable institution on the ground that our Lord in the other world was rich and for our sakes became poor. They would not found the virtue of Christian charity on the doctrine of the Incarnation, but only on the earthly example of Mary's Son. That is to say, they would confine attention to the purely human, the Son of Man. They would not base morality on the purely Divine, the conduct of the Son of God.

That this is the case can scarcely be disputed. And this illustrates the serious difference between a good deal of modern Christianity and the Christianity which has the advantage of being Apostolic.

The Christianity of S. Paul is not concerned only or chiefly with the conduct of a perfect man. It is supremely concerned with the conduct of the Son of God.

The Christianity of S. Paul is not merely concerned with the natural order. It is concerned above all things with the supernatural. The Christ of S. Paul is no mere humanitarian Jesus, but a being Whose existence has no beginning and is rooted in eternity.

That is to say, that a good deal of modern Christianity is of an inferior kind. It is a reduced religion, a religion in which the higher appeals of the Apostolic teaching are simply left out.

How, then, does S. Paul utilize the Pre-existence of Christ as an argument for Christian generosity? The argument is perfectly simple and plain. Our Lord was rich in the glory of His pre-existence in the heavenly state. But of that wealth and glory He divested Himself and laid it all aside. He exchanged it for the condition of life among men. He became poor, poor to an extent only measurable by the difference between heaven and earth: poor by descent from Divine conditions to those which are only human.

And what was the motive of this exchange, this acceptance of such vast inferiority?

You Christians, S. Paul would say, know perfectly well what the motive was. He did it for your sakes. It was a manifestation of supreme generosity.

Here, then, are two incentives to generosity. One is that a certain man called Jesus Christ, a singularly perfect and exemplary human being,

always acted on this principle. He set us an example, which we own to be beautiful, and are as His disciples especially bound to follow.

That is the one incentive.

The other is that a being Whose dwelling is eternity, and Whose nature is divine, was filled with overflowing sympathy with the human race, and in His exceeding generosity laid His glory aside, and for our sakes became human. We therefore are bound to follow His example because generosity is the characteristic of the living God, and He Himself has set us the supreme example.

That is the other incentive.

Can there be a moment's hesitation which of these two incentives to generosity is the stronger and the more appealing?

Remember also that this basis for morals is *peculiar to Christianity*. For no other Religion can appeal to the conduct of one who was rich and for our sakes became poor. Buddha indeed was rich in the sense of earthly possessions, and became poor in the sense that he abandoned them. Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God."<sup>1</sup> But these are illustrations of generosity within purely human limits. Christianity alone presents to contemplation the Godhead itself under the form of One Who was rich and for our sakes became poor.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 24, 25.

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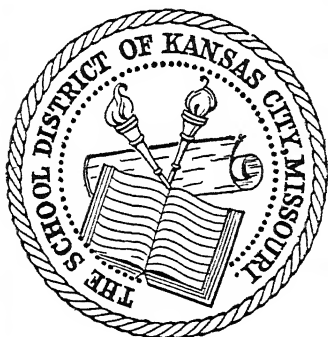






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